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[KEITH LOOKED DOWN INTO THE GROUNDS AND SAW THE FIGURE OF A WOMAN, WRAPPED IN A LONG TRAILING BLACK GARMENT.]

POOR LADY BARBARA.

CHAPTER II.

It was considerably past eight when Keith reached the grand entrance of Landale Park. The young lawyer began to reflect he might have kept his host waiting dinner, since his packing had taken much longer than he had expected.

He was also conscious that his office suit of summer tweed was hardly appropriate to the occasion, and wondered which would be the least infringement of etiquette, to appear as he was or to detain Lord Landale yet further while he changed his clothes. But the man servant who showed him to his room solved his doubts.

"Dinner will be in ten minutes, sir. It was postponed on account of Lady Joan's accident."

Keith bethought himself to inquire after the injured foot, and heard it was only a slight sprain. The doctor had been and said

if the young lady kept to her sofa for a few days, the mischief would soon be remedied.

Lord Landale met his guest as the latter left his room, and they went downstairs together. Dinner was served at once, and while the servants were present the Earl spoke only on everyday subjects; but trivial as was the conversation, Keith learned two things, Lord Landale had followed the little events of Barton as carefully as though he had lived in the town, instead of being away from it for thirteen years, and despite his kindly manner and pleasant smile, some heavy care sat on him.

He drew a sigh almost as of relief when the butler and his satellites at last retired, leaving him alone with his guest; but for some time he did not speak, and when at last he broke the silence it was by a most unexpected question.

"What do you think of Lady Joan?"

Keith was as much prepared with a reply to an inquiry as to what he thought of Venus, but he answered naturally, though certainly with a little surprise visible in his manner.

"I think she is very beautiful. I never saw

any one such a vision of health and loveliness."

Lord Landale smiled.

"You thought she looked well?"

Keith was puzzled at the peristancy.

"I did, indeed. I never met anyone who seemed more so. I trust this sprain is only a trifling matter that need not cause you anxiety," he added, courteously.

Lord Landale sighed.

"I don't think I should be anxious if Joan sprained both her feet. I should, at least, feel she was safe for a while!"

Keith hardly knew how to answer this peculiar speech. He ventured to ask whether Lord Landale intended to settle down at the Park.

"I hope so. If it seems to agree with Joan. I suppose people have thought it odd I kept her away from England so long."

"It was natural you should shun the Park."

"Why?" demanded Lord Landale, haughtily. "It is my home—the spot dearest to me on earth."

"I did not mean to offend you; perhaps I should not have spoken so freely."

"Like plain speaking. Tell me, why is it natural I should shun the Park?"

Keith felt decidedly uncomfortable.

"I have heard this was your chief residence during your wife's life," he said, simply, "so I thought it natural for you to avoid it after her death."

Lord Landale looked at him keenly as though he would read his inmost thoughts. He seemed satisfied with the surmise.

"Of course! You do not remember the Countess?"

Keith shook his head.

"I never saw her. I was very little in Barton during my childhood; but I have heard from many of the beauty of Lady Landale, and after seeing her daughter I can well believe it."

"Joan is not in the least like her. She has not one of her mother's features, and I am glad of it. My wife was an orphan. She had very few near relations, and so there has been no one to interfere with me and my child. Joan has led a strange life for one of her birth, but I think she has been happy."

"I am sure of it. She looks as though she had never known a care."

"She shall never know one I can spare her," said the Earl, fondly. "Her old governess arrives in a week to act as mistress of Landale. If the neighbours come to call they will have to content themselves with me and Mrs. Trevelyan. I won't have Joan roomed!"

"Lady Joan does not look as though she objected to society."

"She knows nothing whatever of it. Beyond the chances acquaintances of the table d'hôte or steamboat, my daughter has had no companions. I have a great objection to foreigners, and have purposely kept her free from all intimacies. Joan has not a friend of her own age in the world."

It came into Keith's head to be sorry for her, the next moment he was marvelling at the triumph with which her father made the announcement.

"I expect you are the first stranger she has spoken to since she came to England," went on Lord Landale. "Your meeting was a strange one; so you know if it had not happened I meant to write to you to-morrow?"

"I am surprised to hear it."

"You see," said the peer, smiling, "though I dare say you have heard nothing but ill of me, I have two good points, I never forget a promise and I am not ungrateful. Years ago I knew your grandfather; I think when he came to die—his end was very sudden—he repented of his harshness to your mother. I was with him at the last, and he made me promise if ever I went home to England to see that you had at least a start in life, a fair chance—so he expressed it—of making your way. I owed a debt of deep gratitude to Lord Munro, and I was not likely to refuse any request of his."

"I am sorry he is dead," said Keith, gravely. "I would never have asked him to help me. I think in my way, Lord Landale, I am as proud as anyone, but I should have liked when I had made a name and fortune for myself, to go to him and ask a friendly welcome—just for my mother's sake."

Lord Landale shook his head.

"He was a singular man, but loyal to the core, the Keiths were all like that. I wonder if you have inherited their truth as well as their name and features."

"Have I inherited their features?"

"So much so that anyone who had known Lord Munro must see the resemblance. Now, I want to understand your position fully. Have you quarrelled with your father—do you take your stand as one apart from the family at Oakdale?"

"I have not quarrelled with my father, Lord Landale; I think he has treated me badly, but it is not quite his own fault. The business came from his wife's family. She

forgets the years of honest work he has given to it, and looks on it as a kind of right that it should pass to her eldest son. If I had only known sooner, I should not have felt it so hard, but for ten years I have looked on myself as surely my father's future partner as the Lady Joan is your heiress."

"Lady Joan is not my heiress; all my property is entailed on male heirs," corrected the Earl; "but I quite understand the comparison you intended. Now, tell me, what do you mean to do?"

"I shall go to London."

"And then?"

"I think I shall get on," said Keith, not boastfully, but with a ring of confidence in his tone which told of steady self-reliance. "In time, I have not the capital to buy a partnership, but I have a willing head and active brain. I can hardly be so unjustly treated a second time. I seem to feel I shall find a niche."

"And I mean to help you find it," returned Lord Landale frankly. "I want to be your friend for your mother's sake; now tell me this: Are you engaged to be married?"

Keith's denial was so hearty and prompt that the Earl saw he meant just what he said. He was not only disengaged, but he was entirely heart whole and fancy free; but the elder man looked more troubled than relieved.

"It is a good thing for a man to marry young," he said, gravely. "It would have smoothed your way. Are you quite sure your prospects were more certain there is no one you could fancy?"

Keith laughed.

"I don't think there is a grain of romance in my nature, my Lord," he said frankly. "I don't believe I ever was the A. C. U. with a young lady for half an hour, and I am sure I never saw one I should like to spend my life with."

Lord Landale looked thoughtful.

"I should like to have helped you. I would gladly have let this house be a sort of second home to you, but you see there is a difficulty; you are young and fancy free, my daughter is beautiful and—"

The hot colour flashed up into Keith's face. He had said truly, in his way he was as proud as any one. He interrupted Lord Landale with a ring of wounded feeling in his tone.

"I am not a fortune-hunter, my Lord," he said, quickly. "I see as well as anyone the vast disparity between an Earl's daughter and a lawyer's apprentice of employment. I am quite aware of the gulf between me and your heiress, and I assure you were she ten times as beautiful and ten times as charming, I should not seek to overthrow it. I have my pride, too, Lord Landale. I don't suppose I shall ever marry anyone; but this much I know, I will never wed a wife richer than myself. I have seen too clearly the heavy price my father has had to pay for the advantages his marriage brought him."

He ended his speech breathless, and saw a broad smile on Lord Landale's face.

"My dear boy," said the Earl, cheerfully, "there was not the least occasion for that burst of indignation, as you would have seen had you let me finish. To begin with, there is no gulf such as you describe between you and Joan. You are both the grandchildren of an English Earl, and if your father is a commoner, my dear wife, Joan's mother, was the same. Then, as I hinted just now, my daughter is not my heiress. All my property is strictly entailed, and must pass to my nephew, so that Joan will have only a moderate portion. The fear running in my mind was this (and, remember, I am trusting you with a secret) I have never breathed even to my own child, you are young and free, Joan is the same; if you saw much of each other a mutual attachment would be a most natural result, and but for one reason would have my unqualified consent; only that reason is all powerful. Joan Disney must go down to her grave unmarried. I have known much sorrow, but I think it would be a keener one to me

than any I have yet felt to see my child's wedding-day."

Keith looked utterly bewildered.

Lord Landale went on slowly, almost as a man who paused to weigh his words.

"Were a Duke of England to ask for her I should refuse him. When I lost my wife, when I saw the agony she suffered, and discovered the complaint had been hereditary in her family for untold generations, I swore a solemn oath that no child of mine should carry such a dire disease on to her descendants."

"I thought the Countess died of consumption?" said Keith, gravely.

"And what disease is more terrible? You may think me a fanatic, young man; but, remember, I have studied the subject deeply. No other husband shall suffer through Joan as I have through her mother. Now you see why I am so very anxious your affections are disengaged. Had it been otherwise I should have gladly looked on you as a son."

Keith did not understand at all—that is he really thought Lord Landale almost morbid on the subject of his wife's disease; but he did grasp the generosity of the peer's nature, and a little of what he had suffered since Lady Landale's death.

"My Lord," he said, simply, "I cannot tell a falsehood even to gain your goodwill. I have never seen a girl I should wish to marry; but in spite of this you convince me into your intimacy. I assure you trouble will never come to you through me. Lady Joan will be as sacred from many presumptuous affection of mine as though she were already another's promised wife. She is very beautiful, but I know myself; I could never bear to follow down the path to my wife."

"And you will keep my secret?"

"Readily; but I do not think, Lord Landale, you will succeed in preventing lovers from seeking Lady Joan. You cannot keep her hidden from the world, and her beauty must win love."

"I have always been Joan's first thought," said the peer, confidently. "I don't think she is the sort of girl to give away her love unsought. The moment I see anyone paying her any particular attention I shall snuff her away. I am a rich man, and she is my one treasure. It is no matter if my whole life is spent in guarding her from danger so that the world does not touch her."

Keith really began to think his host a little morbid. He was but little past fifty; he might have thirty years more to live. He was just at the time of life when he might have been glad to settle down and enjoy the prospect of his daughter's happiness. Did he actually mean to spend his last years in one aimless hurrying about from place to place to protect his child from lovers? It really seemed so!

"I can trust you," said Lord Landale, after a long pause. "For my old friend's sake I mean to do my utmost for your future prospects. In return, you promise me if you have underrated my child's attractions and you feel at any time you are growing attached to her—you will tell me at once."

"I promise more than that," replied Keith Norman. "The moment I venture to think of your daughter as one it would be possible for me to woo and marry I will never willingly look upon her face again."

"And you will tell me no one of my—foible? I do not wish to be held up to ridicule as a mono-maniac or anything of that sort."

"I will never mention your views. Indeed, I have no temptation to do so. I hope to spend my future life in London, and in all that great city I know no one, absolutely no one."

"That can soon be remedied," said Lord Landale. "I am going up to London on business to-morrow, and, of course, I shall see my solicitors. They are excellent men, both of them, but they are getting old, and both of them are bachelors. Now, what I should like, would be to get you into their office. If it

was only a question of capital I'd set you up in practice for yourself gladly, just for your grandfather's sake; but I really think you'd be better off in every way with Bruce and Gardiner. You would have less responsibility, less anxiety, and be gaining more experience."

"You have only forgotten one thing, my lord," suggested Keith, with a smile. "These gentlemen may decline to receive me into their office. Doubtless they have plenty of clerks already, and—"

"Bruce and I were boys together," said Lord Landale, "and I don't think he would refuse any request of mine if he could help it. Besides, to tell the truth, I know he is now looking out for a managing clerk. The fellow who filled that post had an offer to go out to India, and being a fool, jumped at it. You just come up to the Temple with me to-morrow and see what Bruce says to you."

Keith accepted willingly, and they parted for the night.

It was already getting late, and most of the servants had retired.

Rather a sleepy-looking footman showed Mr. Norman the way to his room, and our hero, threw himself into an easy chair by the open window to think over the events of the last twelve hours which had changed the whole tenor of his life.

He had seen very little of the world; only what life at a public school and the experience of a country lawyer's office could teach him. He had travelled very little, but he possessed by nature a clear, keen judgment, and a ready perception.

Keith Norman could see things that would have passed unnoticed by an older man, and as he sat in his luxurious room and thought of the unexpected help Lord Landale had so generously offered him, the question would recur to him again and again, what mystery hung over the Earl? What cause, besides his wife's death, had made him the anxious, troubled man he was?

Keith would never have put the feeling into words. Not to his closest friend would he have expressed his certainty that Lord Landale had a secret care. But as he recalled the sad, almost stricken look on the Earl's face he felt convinced that, despite his wealth and rank, some heavy trouble weighed on the spirits of the master of the Park.

As to the extraordinary promise exacted of him regarding Lady Joan Keith gave it without a scruple. She was very beautiful, and he admired her just as he might have done a rare picture or lovely ornament; but he had heard his stepmother too often throw her money in her husband's teeth to make him ever dream of a rich wife.

He knew Joan Disney had probably a far nobler nature than Matilda Norman, but he would never have put it in any woman's power to say she made his fortune, and for the rest he had no thought of love or marriage.

Keith's heart at this time was bound up in two things—his profession and his little half-sister Kathleen.

The room allotted to him at the Park was a striking contrast to the bare, comfortless chamber Mrs. Norman thought good enough for her stepson.

It was large and lofty, and furnished with dainty china hangings. It had, in fact, as Keith learned later on, been intended for Lady Joan's use, but she had preferred rooms in the front. This faced the grounds, and was on the first floor, the Ezench windows opening on to a balcony, at the end of which a short flight of steps led down to the terrace beneath.

It was almost midnight, but Keith had not the slightest desire to go to bed, he felt, indeed, almost preternaturally wide awake. He rose at last, and flinging back the shutters, opened the window and stepped out on to the balcony. The moon was at the full, and by its soft, silvery splendour the grounds were light as day, and had, besides, a kind of weird, unearthly beauty which seemed to give a tinge

of sadness to the scene—an effect often produced by moonlight. Keith looked upon the smooth velvet turf, the tasteful flower beds, and marvelled how Lord Landale could have borne to stay so long away from so fair a home. He was thinking of closing the window and retiring from the balcony when a woman's voice fell on his ear; one single word in a faint, weary voice, which yet had a kind of music in it, "Stop!"

He was by nature the least imaginative of men. Keith was the last person to believe in things supernatural, or to be the victim of any human attempt to play the ghost, but this one word seemed to hold him spell-bound. He simply could not leave the balcony; a strange shiver passed over him, but he stood there, motionless, waiting for what was to come next.

He looked down into the grounds and saw the figure of a woman, wrapped in some long trailing black garment which hid her form, but the moon fell full on her face, and Keith felt a thrill of horror as he gazed on her, for the features were those of Lady Joan. The hair he could not see, it was hidden by the dark hood, but the beautiful eyes were there, only with a great sadness in their depths; the cheeks were thin and wasted, but the mouth had the same sweetness of expression, only tinged with a vast regret.

Keith felt he was the victim of a dream, and yet he could not force himself to leave the spot. It was impossible, he argued, that this could be Lord Landale's daughter, the beautiful girl whom he knew to have retired to rest early on account of her sprained foot; but Joan Disney had no sister or cousin to appear suddenly before him, even if it had been likely that a kinswoman of Lord Landale should be abroad alone at such an hour. It was Joan's face, only looking as hers might do, when a world of sorrow should have dimmed its brightness, and many bitter tears have driven the roses from her cheeks.

He stood there motionless. He was a brave man, and yet he shuddered; he longed to ring for assistance; any human companionship would have been welcome; even a servant's; but then supposing before such companionship arrived the figure on the lawn vanished, what excuse could he give for disturbing the house? What would Lord Landale think of a lawyer who saw visions at midnight?

Besides, the Earl was already almost morbidly anxious over his only child; supposing he did not scoff at Keith's story, would it not add to his fears for Lady Joan?

Five minutes of blank silence, Keith Norman feeling his blood run cold; then the voice came again.

"You are Lord Landale's friend, he trusts you."

"And I will be faithful to the trust," said Keith, warmly. "I know not who or what you are, but I warn you, an enemy to Lord Landale and his child is one to me!"

A faint smile flickered over the sad pale face. One thin white hand was raised, was it in blessing or in curse?

"You will be faithful to her—faithful through all, even when the storm bursts, promise it to me!"

Amazed, Keith again thought of ringing for assistance, and risking all the consequences that might ensue, but the figure on the lawn seemed to understand his purpose, and said hastily,—

"You will be true to her, swear it! Poor girl, she will need every friend she has; though Lord Landale's fears are groundless, she will never inherit his wife's doom."

"I will be her friend," said Keith, answering the strange speaker almost in spite of himself. "Who and what you are I know not, but you may be sure of this, while I live I will do all that friendship can for Lord Landale and his daughter."

"Even in poverty and disgrace?"

"Still more in poverty—disgrace could never touch them!"

He looked again on to the lawn and saw no

one. He rubbed his eyes and wondered if he had been asleep.

He knew that he had had a day of unusual excitement, and that on first reaching his room he had flung himself into an easy chair, and tried to understand Lord Landale's strange confidence. Might it not be that while pondering over Joan Disney's history he had fallen asleep?

What more natural, then, than that he should dream of her, that a figure with her face should appear and enjoin his protection for her?

Of course, that was the explanation. It was all nonsense to think that the creature he had seen, was anything but the creation of a dream.

Still, for all that, he locked the windows and bolted the shutters over them, though he had never in his life before slept without a little fresh air.

He lighted two candles on the mantelpiece, bolted his door, and got into bed with a strange sense of expectancy, but nothing happened.

He fell asleep as soon almost as his head touched the pillow, and did not wake until the footman appeared with his hot water (entering through the dressing-room, whose door Keith had forgotten), and the information breakfast was at nine, as Lord Landale wished to catch the ten o'clock express to London.

Keith found that Lady Joan was not to appear at breakfast, but the Earl took him to her boudoir afterwards to bid her good-bye, and the sight of her bright face and calm, untroubled smile did more than anything else to destroy the memory of his strange dream.

"Good-bye," said Joan, gently. "Papa says I ought to be very much obliged to you, but I tell him he is the person to be grateful, since I saved him the trouble of sending for you. Mind you come back and see us when you are famous."

"Before that, I hope," said her father, kindly; "for I have been telling Mr. Norman he is to look on the Park as a second home."

"And you or I will quarrel with some one on purpose for Mr. Norman to plead our case, and cover himself with glory."

"A lawyer does not plead, Lady Joan," said Keith, lightly, "and I should be sorry for either you or the Earl to go to law. It is not exactly a pleasant proceeding."

"Well, if we ever do, remember you are engaged on our side," laughed the girl, good naturedly.

Little did they think those light words would ever be proved true. Little did they dream that bright-haired Joan would ever be the heroine of a *cause célèbre*, which well-nigh stirred England to its utmost bounds.

The Earl and his *protégé* travelled to London by express train, lunched at the Station Hotel, and then set off on foot for the Temple. It was early still, not much after two o'clock.

"I hate cabs," said Lord Landale, as they strolled along, "and we can talk much better walking."

Keith was quite willing. Such friends as Lord Landale are seldom met with. There was not the slightest tinge of patronage about the Earl's kindness. He seemed utterly to forget that Keith's father was only a country lawyer, whose wife he had forbidden his countess to visit. It was more as though he thought of the young man only as the grandson of his old friend Lord Mauro.

"Of course, it's a piece of cruel injustice, this putting your step-brother over your head," he said, thoughtfully; "but from all I have heard of Barton affairs I should not wonder if it turned out to be the best thing that could have happened to you."

"I have often thought I should like a London life," confessed Keith.

"I don't mean only that. I have heard your father has been speculating pretty considerably of late. Hitherto all has succeeded; but if his luck changes the liability is unlimited, and everything, even Oakdale itself,

would go to the hammer, and there would be absolutely nothing left but the business. Now, as Mrs. Norman would certainly demand the lion's share for her family, you would literally be spending the best years of your life in supporting her and her children. It is far better for her own son to be in that position."

"I don't think it will suit Bryan."

"It will do him good. They tell me he thinks of nothing at present but amusement. It never answers to spoil a young man, and Mrs. Norman has done her best to ruin Bryan from his birth."

There was no time for more conversation, for they had reached their destination. The clerk knew Lord Landale well, and ushered him and his companion at once into Mr. Bruce's presence.

Keith saw a grave, thoughtful man, not far from sixty, with keen, penetrating eyes, and a not unkindly expression; but he was hardly prepared for the solicitor's reception of himself.

"You need not introduce us, my lord," said the man of law, holding out his hand to the young stranger. "I know this must be Lady Diana Keith's son."

Lord Landale looked well pleased.

"I thought you would see the resemblance, Bruce. You are so sharp at seeing likenesses; but it is not on account of that I brought him here. His father has treated him shamefully, and I want you to take him into your office."

"My office is hardly a refuge for oppressed young men," said Mr. Bruce, sharply; "but, perhaps, you know something of law?" and he looked questioningly at Keith.

"I was admitted five years ago, and I have had a good deal of experience in country practice, but my brother is joining my father now, and there is not work for three of us in the office."

"So you are turned adrift?" pursued Mr. Bruce, grimly. "Well, I'll think it over. I knew your mother, young man, and I like your face; but, of course, I must consider it, and consult my partner."

John Gardener was a valetudinarian, who, or the last three years had drawn a moderate income from the office and spent it in rushing about Europe in search of health. Consulting him was the merest matter of form, indeed, as he was then in Norway, and his partner promised Keith his decision in two days; unless the affair was explained by telegram, the absentee would probably never hear of the matter till it was concluded.

The answer, when it came, was favourable. Keith Norman found himself managing clerk to the old-established firm, with a salary of five hundred a year.

"And," said Mr. Bruce, thoughtfully, when Keith spoke of seeking lodgings, "perhaps for the present you had better live with me. I have a large rambling house at Fulham, where there's room for a dozen young men, and I don't hold with bachelor lodgings—never did. You come to me, at any rate, for the first six months, then if we quarrel you can move."

But long before the six months were over both knew there would be no question of their parting. The lonely bachelor, who had so few objects on which to expend affection, took the young man to his inmost heart, and Keith learned to respect Mr. Bruce as he had never been able to respect his own father.

Of Barton and the inhabitants of Oakdale in particular, he heard very little. Lord Landale had only remained at the Park a month, and was now travelling on the Continent; and Mr. Norman chose to take offence at his son's good fortune, declared he ought to have been consulted in the matter, and that Keith leaving him without proper notice had injured the office.

There was no doubt the practice had suffered, but that was as much from Bryan's presence as Keith's absence. That young man was so incorrigibly lazy that his carelessness drove a few of the older and more influential clients to desert the firm.

Some of them transferred their business to Mr. Flint, but others followed Lord Landale's example, and employed a London lawyer. Perhaps it was natural they should choose one with whose manager they were already familiar; but it was gall and wormwood to the master and mistress of Oakdale, who did not scruple to assert Keith was trying to ruin his father.

"Never mind," was Kenneth Bruce's advice, when Keith lamented this to him. "If hard words broke any bones I fancy most of us would be crippled. When your father needs your help he will be glad enough to make friends."

It was so exact a description of the lawyer's character that Keith quite started.

"I often think you must have known someone very like my father, Mr. Bruce, you understand him so perfectly."

"I knew him intimately before you were born."

Keith started.

"I have often meant to tell you, my boy," the old lawyer went on, "but the opportunity never seemed to offer. Your father was articled to me. He served his time in the very office where you are manager now."

"But—"

"Hear me out, Keith. He was just admitted a youth of three-and-twenty when one of our clients required a lawyer to go into the country and receive his instructions. There were many old family papers to examine, and altogether it was a tedious business, which I expected would entail more than a week's absence. I had no partner then, and it seemed absolutely impossible for me to leave the office so long. Your father was a fully qualified solicitor, clever, and, as I thought, energetic. It was a very natural thing to send him in my stead, but I have regretted it to this very day."

"Surely he did not abuse your confidence?"

"Not in the way you mean. I believe his advice was as sound as my own could have been, but it was a tedious business. It had to do with cutting off the entail of an old estate, and many formalities were required. Altogether John Norman was away a month."

"And you wanted him here?"

"Not particularly. It was what went on there that I have always regretted. He was young, you see, and good-looking. I suppose what happened was not surprising—he fell in love with my client's youngest child, Lady Diana Keith."

Keith looked eagerly into the speaker's face. At last, then, he was to hear the story of his mother's marriage.

"I could have forgiven him if he had only been frank and told Lord Munro the truth. Lady Diana was her father's favourite, and I feel sure he would have relented and yielded to her entreaties; but Norman never even condescended to ask him. A fortnight after his return to town he took a month's leave of absence, and the next thing I heard was that he and Lady Diana had eloped."

The old lawyer never said a word to prove such was the case, but his manner seemed to Keith to hint that he too had loved Lady Diana.

It was a subject never mooted between these two men, but from that night Keith felt certain Mr. Bruce had loved his fair young mother, and that it was his own resemblance to her which had found him favour in the lawyer's eyes.

"Of course he had to leave," went on Mr. Bruce. "It would have been a regular scandal for me to keep him after that. Lord Munro would have quarrelled with me on the spot, and I had been friendly with his family too long to sacrifice them to Mr. Norman. He never seemed fond of law, and so I got him a classical tutorship in a good school, and they did not do so badly till—the end. He was frantic then, threw up his mastership, and went down to some little country town—I never heard the name, but I suppose it was Barton—and buried himself alone. I always think he

really loved Diana, though he did put another woman in her place little more than a year afterwards."

"I have never seen him since the day of your mother's funeral. I followed her to the grave; as the daughter of one of my most valued friends I could hardly do less; but then I closed all intercourse with your father for ever."

"I know my grandfather is dead," said Keith; "but does his son ever come to the office? I suppose, though, he must, as you are his lawyer. I wonder if I shall recognise him?"

"You had better study the peerage," said Mr. Bruce, sarcastically. "Your ignorance is quite refreshing."

"I know his title," said the young man, flushing at what seemed to him a sneer. "It must be the same as his father's, and he was Lord Munro of Studley Grange, and Lord Landale said I was like the family, so you see I might recognize him well without an introduction; and really, Mr. Bruce, I can't make out what special ignorance I have displayed."

"Why, you see, Keith, dead men don't generally call at offices, or, indeed, need lawyers, and your uncle has been dead these fifteen years."

"Dead! I think I'm sorry."

"You need not be!" said Mr. Bruce, firmly, "if ever there was a life not to be regretted it was your uncle's. Why, even before your mother's marriage he had made his name so notorious that he was forced to join with his father in cutting off the entail. They say there is a black sheep in every family; but I hope it's not many can boast of one quite so black as Viscount Keith. He died three years before his father, and I think the Earl was thankful for it."

"Don't you feel curious about Studley Grange?" asked Mr. Bruce after a long silence. "It is in Yorkshire, and is one of the finest estates in England. I never saw its equal."

"I should like to see it well enough. If the grounds are open to the public I might take a holiday in that direction some summer, and get a glimpse of the place which was my mother's home."

"And have you no curiosity as to its possessor?"

"I think I have my own share of pride and other people's too," said Keith, gravely, "for I should never care to seek acquaintance with my mother's family, lest they should think I had designs on their property."

"Keith, do you know that Studley Grange is almost like a nightmare to me. I have often thought of telling you the story as though it were a stranger's, and asking your opinion of it. I am still solicitor to the estate, and I tell you plainly it gives me more anxious moments than all the rest of my business put together."

Keith kept silent a moment.

"If I can be of any use to you, Mr. Bruce, pray tell me the story. I assure you I can think of the matter as unprejudicedly as though my mother had never called the Grange her home. The idea of obtaining anything from her family has never once entered my head."

"I am sure of that. Well, listen."

And it seemed to Keith Norman as he did so that no romance ever conceived by ready-brained novelist was stranger or more perplexing than the Mystery of Studley Grange.

(To be continued.)

THERE is many a man who we call friend, and whose face seems familiar to us as our own; yet could we but take a glimpse of him when we leave his presence, and he sinks back into his chair alone, we should sigh to see how often the smile on the frankest lip is but a bravery of the drill, only worn when on parade.—BULWER.

ROY'S INHERITANCE.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"JOY!" exclaimed Jack Prinsep, as Nora returned to the ball-room, her eyes shining like two stars, the happiest of smiles hovering about her pretty mouth, her whole beauty glorified, and irradiated by the supreme content which was quickening all her pulses.

"She's been and gone and done it!" he grumbled to himself; for boy-like, his ardent feelings developed at a rapid rate, as soon as the prize which he had never coveted was out of his reach.

Captain Falconer was utterly oblivious of all other engagements, and devoted himself to Nora Macdonald in such an audacious fashion that the Duchess looked on grimly, imagining that "the little sneak" had wheedled him into an engagement; and the Countess nodded and smiled, fancying that her favourite castle in the air was complete at last; and Fred Sinclair was obliged to rush off into a violent flirtation with Lady Alice in order to hide the wild jealousy that was driving him mad; and the good-natured Duke was already wondering what fine appointment he could give the Hussar as a wedding-present.

It was very wrong of Roy, but in a week's time he would be miles and miles away, and he told himself that a few eccentricities were permissible when the last dance meant a last good-bye. Nora was lost in a dream, and could not trouble her head for a moment about such prosaic old things as the conveniences of society. She had made her explanation to Roy Falconer, and they were friends once more. She asked for nothing beyond, and the ball-room in spite of its stately proportions was scarcely large enough to hold her great content. Together they went in to supper—together they stood in the hall when the last farewells had to be said.

"Oh dear, darling Lady Clavering! How can I ever thank you enough for making me come!" and two beautifully moulded arms were flung round the Countess's neck, whilst rapturous kisses were pressed on her cheeks.

"You've nothing to thank me for," and Lady Clavering patted Nora's cheek with a fond smile.

"I can't tell you how delighted I am, and I shall come over to Mountfalcon to congratulate you to-morrow. I suppose the old man will let me in."

"Congratulate me!" Nora looked up with scared eyes.

"Yes, you little humbug! I don't require two eyes to see what has happened. Take care of her, Roy, and don't let those harum-scarum boys deposit her in a ditch."

"No, I'm going to see that she gets there safely," he answered, with a smile. "I wouldn't trust her to anyone else." Then he turned round and caught hold of Sinclair. "You'll let me take your place, won't you? there's a good fellow." Fred shook off Roy's hand, and answered gruffly,—

"You've taken it already!" Then he went outside, and leant his curly head against one of the pillars of the portico, wondering if life could ever be the same to him again without the Fairy Princess.

Oh that drive back to Mountfalcon! Would Nora Macdonald ever forget it? There was no one to interfere, for poor Jack was still performing the office of coachman, and solacing himself with thoughts of that awfully jolly girl in blue.

It was bliss sufficient to be alone with Roy Falconer, and to know that he had come for this long, cold drive simply to be with her.

He told her all the story of his life, and, without one self-pitying thought for his present poverty, went on to speak of his hopes for the future, as if it had been his dearest wish to go to India.

"At last I shall have my chance, and it will be my own fault if I don't use it. The Afghans are plucky fellows, and quite worth the trouble of fighting them. I've always longed to be on active service, and now my time has come," he said, with the zeal of a true soldier.

"Then you are glad to go?" in a small voice.

"For some reasons—yes, intensely glad. I shouldn't be worthy of the name of a soldier if I weren't." After a pause, he added, "Wherever I am, I shall always be thinking of the dear little girl who is taking care of the old man at Mountfalcon, and—and—" rather huskily, "if she marries, I hope the man will be a thoroughly good fellow, who will know how to prize her properly."

No answer.

"Think of me as an elder brother, dear," taking her little hand in his strong grasp, and bending over her tenderly, "and never let anything or anybody come between us, promise me that."

"Not if you do as I ask you," stooping over her withered violets, and feeling dreadfully inclined to cry, for half the glory of her coming freedom would be taken from it if he were in India and she in England.

A pressure of the hand was the only answer, for Roy was keeping himself in check to the best of his ability, for he realised, rather too late, that if he could not marry her, it would be a sorry trick to win her poor little heart.

"The gates are open!" he exclaimed, in surprise, as they turned up the avenue at Mountfalcon. "I'm afraid you've been found out!"

"It will make no difference, for he would have known to-morrow. But something has happened! Look at all those people and the policemen," she cried, in a fright.

"It mayn't be anything," he said, soothingly; but his own heart sank in his breast. "You stay in the carriage, whilst I go in and see."

She shook her head, but sat on in frightened silence, her fears increasing as they drew nearer to the hall. What could it be? The opened gates, the groups gathered together on this freezing night to stare at closed windows, the policemen called from every station near, as if some fearful tragedy had happened within those ancient walls! A police officer opened the door of the wagonette. Roy spoke to him in a low voice, then turned to Nora.

"You won't stay here?"

"No, not for anything!"

The people stared and whispered to each other.

"That's the young master and Miss Macdonald. Whatever have they been up to?"

"Come in, Prinsep, somebody will hold the horses," said Roy. George the groom stepped forward, touched his forelock and took his place in the front of the tired animals, whilst the three went in together.

The large hall was empty and as silent as the grave; but a fire had been lighted in the huge grate, which had been disused for many years, and revenged itself by sending out volumes of smoke.

Nora looked round with scared eyes, expecting to see something horrible, and clung to Jack's arm as if for protection.

Roy had taken a few steps in the direction of the music-room, when the door opened, and out came Venables, looking white and scared, with ten years at least added to his life since the day before.

Nora sprang towards him.

"Where's Lord Mountfalcon? Is he ill?"

The valet looked at Captain Falconer, and then at the white, eager face close beside him. There was something in the girl's attire, as she stood there in her ball-dress which seemed so incongruous with the awful news he had to tell, that the words stuck in his throat. "No, his lordship's not ill. Worse than that!" he said, hoarsely.

"Worse! what do you mean, man?" broke in Roy, impetuously.

Venables raised his grave eyes to the young master's earnest face.

"His lordship is dead!"

"Dead, how and when?" gasped Roy, whilst Nora clung on to the edge of a table, shaking from head to foot, unable to speak a word, but fixing haggard eyes on the valet's lips.

"Murdered!" The horrid word came hoarsely from his parched tongue.

"Murdered! Good heavens! How awful!" with whitening lips, and then as Nora's slight figure swayed to one side, he took her in his arms, and placed her in a chair, where Jack supported her, whilst listening horror-struck to the terrible tale. "How was it done? Weren't you with him? Oh, if I had only been there!" cried Roy, with almost a wail.

The valet clasped the back of a chair—and went on in a low voice. "I missed his lordship first about eleven o'clock, when I went in to give him what he always took. He had got out of bed almost as soon as he was in, and I knew where he had gone to. I followed as fast as I could to the Red-room. As I got near it, Grimper came out of her room, and as we went to the door we heard a scuffle, and one or two shots. I tore in like a madman, but only just in time," his voice growing husky, "to catch the master, who fell backwards into my arms. The room was full of smoke, but I'm certain I saw two men there, if not more, but they vanished through a door which I never knew of in the wall, and as soon as they were out of sight, there was another shot, and a noise as of falling. We got the master on to the bed; but it was all over; we could do nothing for him. We rang the alarm-bell, and when Andrewes and George came, we searched the place."

"Did you find any one?" dashing away a tear and trying to steady his voice. The poor old man gone for ever—beyond all hope of reconciliation? Roy never knew how he had clung to the hope of being reconciled to his grandfather till he found that he had gone where his voice could never reach him. Now a fierce desire for vengeance came upon him, and he felt that he should like to slay the murderer with his own hand, as he asked his question.

The valet looked across at Jack as if doubtful whether he ought to say anything more before him.

"Go on," said Roy. "Mr. Prinsep is to be trusted as much as myself."

Jack gave a grave nod, and Venables went on. "There was a secret staircase, which none of us knew of, leading down into the library, and at the foot of it we found Mr. Philip doubled up, with a shot through his chest. He was stone dead."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Falconer.

"After that we found the young lady missing, and did not know what to think. Grimper would have it that—"

"Miss Macdonald had gone to a ball at Lady Clavering's," interrupted Roy, quickly. "She did not like to mention it before, but she meant to have told him to-morrow."

"Ah, indeed! I was in a way about it myself, for I made sure that being so courageous she had run out to give the alarm, and been murdered by the ruffians to keep her quiet. I'm thankful, I'm sure, to see the poor young lady safe."

Roy bent forward, and lowered his voice. "You've no reason to think my uncle did it?"

"No, sir," in a cautious whisper. "I feel sure that he came to take the money, for it's not the first time he has tried that on, but you see he has been mixed up with a loose lot of late years, and my belief is that they got wind of the money upstairs, and followed him down here, determined to have some of the plunder. The police have found a few things in the colonnade by which they hope to trace them."

"I am glad of it," sternly. Then turning to Jack, he asked if he would mind staying at Mountfalcon for that night as he thought

Miss Macdonald would like to have one of her own family with her under the circumstances. The boy was shudderingly anxious to get out of the place, but he would not desert his cousin for the world, if he could really be a comfort to her, so he instantly consented to stay.

"Show me Miss Macdonald's room."

Venables was surprised. "I beg your pardon, sir, but don't you think Miss Macdonald would feel lonesome and strange up there?"

"Yes, let me stay somewhere downstairs," she said, faintly. "I—I can't be alone!"

Roy took her into the library, placed her on a sofa, covered her up with wraps, arranged the cushions under the small brown head, and then telling her to go to sleep turned to Jack, and advised him to do the same, pointing to a large arm-chair in which he could ensconce himself.

"And you?" said Jack, shivering over the fire which had just been lighted.

"Oh, I've got to see after things," Roy said, with a shudder and a sigh, for he knew it was his duty to go and take a last look at the bodies of his uncle and grandfather, as well as to talk over necessary arrangements with the police. Grimper was busy, and did not appear. He did not ask after her, for he guessed what she was doing. He left the room, and soon after Mrs. Wiltshire came in with some nice hot tea. They were both very glad of it, and as they drank it the cook gave them a fearful and incoherent account of all that had happened, winding up with thanking the Lord for sending the young master there just when he was wanted.

Philip Falconer had once imagined that he could count on Wiltshire and Andrew as his friends in the household; but they had always been devoted to the Captain, although not so fiercely antagonistic to himself as the unconventional Grimper.

Roy came in an hour later to find Jack fast asleep, and Nora sobbing wildly with her face hidden in her hands, and most of her wraps fallen on the ground.

He knelt down by her, and soothed her as well as he could, but the tears were standing in his eyes, and his own heart was as heavy as lead.

"Oh, if I had only been here," she sobbed. "Thank Heaven you weren't," with a shudder, "or I should have lost you as well. Try not to think of it, and go to sleep."

"Sleep!" excitedly. "I shall never sleep again."

"Yes, you will. He was like a father to me once," his voice breaking, "but I manage to bear it somehow."

"He loved you all the while," rubbing her eyes with her limp pocket handkerchief. "His very last words," with a tragic sigh, "were 'Heaven bless you, and the poor boy too. I was very fond of him once.'"

"He said that? I'm so thankful. It wasn't his fault that he turned against me, and Roy, leaning his arm on the head of the sofa, rested his face on his hand, and let his thoughts go fondly back to the past—to the days when the little grandson was the pride of the Viscount's heart.

That terrible night seemed as if it would never end.

As the slow hours dragged on to the late wintry dawn Roy had plenty to do; but ever and again he kept coming back to the library, where Jack was always fast asleep, and Nora as persistently wide awake.

With the utmost tenderness and patience he did his best to calm and comfort her; but her nerves had received such a terrible shock, that she could not rest and be still.

He drew a chair close beside her, and talked to her like the kindest of brothers, and for a little while she would listen to him gratefully, and try with all her might to keep quiet; but after a few minutes she would start up, shivering and shuddering, as if she saw the murdered man lying on the floor of that very room.

She excused all his tenderest feelings, even

while she deprived him of the smallest opportunity for rest, and he was really thankful to Jack Prinsep for sleeping so soundly, and letting him have the charge of the sweet little thing to himself.

Oh! the horror that came upon him as soon as he was outside in the hall, for the presence of death seemed to be everywhere.

The Viscount had been placed on his own bed; but his son had been carried into the music room, where he lay on the sofa, white, cold, and defiant even in his last sleep, for his soul had passed away when he was struggling hard to defend his stolen gains.

There was some of his heart's blood on the stone steps leading from the library to the room above; and Grimper, though she tried her best with soda and soap, could never efface the stain.

That hidden treasure in the Red Room had brought death to Lord Mountfalcon, and disgrace as well as death to his son; but the chest was empty, and the treasure gone; and let us hope that the curse had vanished as well from the home of the Falconers.

As soon as the news of the tragedy reached the Chase Lady Clavering had the horses put into her landau, and drove over to Mountfalcon.

Dr. Adair, who was away from home when the groom from the Hall came to fetch him, had already been, and pronounced Miss Macdonald to be suffering from an attack of brain-fever.

Roy and Jack were seriously alarmed, but the Countess relieved them by saying that she would carry off the patient at once to the Chase, where she should be nursed with the tenderest care.

The doctor looked grave at the idea of the patient being moved; but he agreed that she would have a better chance of recovery in any other house than Mountfalcon.

CHAPTER XXXIX, AND LAST.

For a long time Eleanor Macdonald was dangerously ill, though nursed with the utmost care.

Mrs. Prinsep was telegraphed for, and came at once. She had been comforting herself with the idea that the tragedy at Mountfalcon would set her niece free, and she was prepared to welcome her back very warmly to Myrtle Lodge, which was rather desolate without the girls.

It was, therefore, a relief to her mind rather than a disappointment that Nora had lost her chances of being an heiress by the Viscount's tragic death; and Jack was frankly delighted, for he had felt uneasy lest the possession of such a large fortune should make a gulf between him and his dear old chum—for a "chum" he always considered her, though she happened to be a girl.

The Duchess of Honiton, having been made aware of her mistake in looking upon the poor girl as a mercenary interloper, showed her penitence by constantly driving over to inquire after her, and to bring her some lovely flowers.

The smartest of carriages were continually driving up to the door with anxious inquiries after Miss Macdonald's health; and the public in general was waiting eagerly for her recovery, hoping then to hear the true story of the Viscount's and Philip Falconer's death.

The version of the affair which appeared in the papers led people to believe that the son had died in defending his father from armed burglars; so a veil was cast over the shameful details, and the name of Falconer was saved from disgrace.

The thieves were never discovered, for every clue failed; and, as Lord Mountfalcon preferred space to bank-notes, there was no means of tracing the lost money, for sovereigns tell no tales.

All exciting topics were avoided by those who watched over the invalid; but, as Nora

began to regain her strength, her mind resumed its activity, and Mountfalcon, with all connected with it, was constantly in her thoughts.

Lady Clavering, having received strict instructions from the doctor, did not dare to mention Roy's name, and whenever he was in the house his visits were kept a dead secret.

Nora, putting two and two together, came to the conclusion that he had gone to India; and sighed to think that she would never have the power to change his poverty into wealth.

She remembered how Lord Mountfalcon had told her that he had torn up his last will, and sent for his lawyer to make another.

But if the lawyer ever came, it could only have been to find his client dead, and the fortune which was to have been her's must have gone to somebody else, probably to those hospitals he was always talking of as his possible legatees. The failure of all her cherished plans naturally depressed her spirits, and Lady Clavering being urged on by somebody in the background, began to think that her patient wanted rousing.

Nora was sitting in the boudoir, looking exceedingly fair in a close fitting black dress, which she wore out of respect to the late Lord Mountfalcon's memory. It was made so faintly that it scarcely looked like a garb of mourning, and only formed a pleasant contrast to the bright colouring of this luxurious little room. Some violets were on her lap, which she was tying into bunches for Lady Rose, who did not mind picking them, but objected strongly to any trouble with them afterwards. The door opened gently; without looking round, she said,—

"Come in, darling, I shall have done them in a moment."

"Yes, darling, and you shall give them all to me," answered Roy, now Lord Mountfalcon, with a mischievous smile lighting up his handsome face. He was dressed in mourning, and had certainly grieved for his grandfather; but there was no sadness about his expression to-day, which looked as bright as the spring sunshine.

The next minute he was sorry that he had startled her, for all the violets fell down on the floor as she started up, turning deathly white.

"I—I thought you were in India," she said, shakily.

He drew her down on to the sofa, and sitting beside her, scanned the delicate face with earnest eyes.

"My poor little child, how ill you've been," and his face grew very grave.

"But I'm all right now," with a smile, trying to seem calm and composed, though her heart was fluttering like a bird.

"We needn't have quarrelled over the money," coming a little nearer.

"Oh, but I'm so disappointed," the tears rushing to her eyes, "to think after all my promises I have nothing to give you."

"You must give me something else."

"That's nonsense; and it's nothing to joke about."

"I never was more in earnest in my life. I want something better than a heap of tin. I want your dear little self," enclosing her slight form in his arms.

"No! no! no! I never meant that!" struggling to free herself from his embrace, half driven wild by the fear that he might think she had planned this from the first.

"I only wanted to make you rich, and go away."

"That was very unkind of you. Don't you know that I value you ten thousand times higher than all the estates in the world? Give me your love, dear, and I shall be richer than anybody else," looking down into the sweet face so near his own, with passionate longing in his eyes. "Nora, what is it? why don't you want to have me?" a sudden misgiving coming like a dash of cold water on his soothing hopes.

She hid her face in her hands, and he bent

his head to hear the little broken murmur that came through them.

"Lady Alice, you must marry her!"

"I'm much obliged, but your old friend Sinclair would object as much as I. You nearly broke her heart, but I believe he has mended it."

"I thought you liked her?" with a sob.

"I like her very much; but, Nora, answer me one question," looking quite stern in his intense earnestness. "Do you love me?"

Her heart seemed to leap in answer, but she could not say a word. Lower and lower bent her head whilst her bosom heaved tumultuously. Gently, very gently, he pulled those little hands away, then drew her close to his eager heart.

"My own, my own at last!" and his lips met hers once more in a passionate kiss.

A long silence followed, but it was the silence of a joy too great for words. All doubts, fears and troubles seemed to be gone for ever as her sunny head rested on his shoulder, and she knew that nothing but death would ever part them now.

Roy's whole heart went out to her in a flood of tenderness, the sense of loneliness which had oppressed him ever since he had been ousted from his home, disappeared now that he had some one to care for more than himself, and he vowed to be the best and kindest of husbands as he kissed the tears from her long lashes.

If he could help it, he thought, she should never cry again, forgetting that half the pleasure of joy would be gone if it were never contrasted with pain.

At last Lady Clavering's hopes were realised, and she gave them both her most hearty congratulations. She had been terribly disappointed on finding that she had taken things too much for granted on the evening of her dance, and had vowed that she would never believe her own eyes again.

Everyone was delighted except the Duchess of Honiton and Mr. Frederick Sinclair. They suffered several twinges of jealousy, but the Duke contrived to heal his wife's, and Lady Alice Hawkshaw's smiles had something to do with Fred's subsequent sublime resignation.

"Good comes out of evil," said Lady Clavering, solemnly, the last day of Nora's stay at the Chase. "If it hadn't been for the old gentleman's sudden death, Mountfalcon might really have gone to the hospitals."

"And who has got it? I forgot to ask," Nora asked with interest.

"Roy, of course. Do you mean to say he never told you? There was no will, so he stepped into everything, being the direct heir."

"Oh, I'm so intensely thankful," clasping her hands. "I always felt somehow as if it were my fault."

"It wasn't your fault that the old gentleman clouded his brain with those continual draughts of whisky."

"He was ill, but I don't believe he drank," in a shocked tone.

"My dear child, that was the reason why you were shut up like a prisoner, so that you might tell no tales; and depend upon it, if you had stayed on at Mountfalcon it would always have been the same. He never lost the sense of his own degradation, and he had a morbid horror of its coming to the knowledge of the world. Roy suspected it, and it grieved him to the heart, that wretched Philip was sure of it, and only laughed. That shows the difference between the two men," said the Countess, with a smile.

"Roy's the best man that ever lived," said Lady Rose, with conviction, "but he promised to marry me last Tuesday, and he hasn't done it yet."

Nora laughed, caught the child in her arms, and kissed her warmly.

Mr. and Mrs. Prinsep exerted themselves to the utmost in order to give a fitting wedding

feast to their niece, or, rather, Mrs. P. went through the trouble of all the preparations, whilst her husband contented himself with providing the funds, and looking on with quiet approval.

Mary and Jane came back for the grand event, with their respective husbands, and the village of Hillington took the greatest interest in the proceedings.

There were extraordinary stories of the splendid way in which the young Viscount was setting his house in order; but he was only making it what he considered a fitting frame for such a jewel as his lovely wife.

The secret passage was hermetically sealed up, so that the blood-stained steps might never raise unhappy memories of the past; and the whole suite of rooms was refurnished and hung with charming draperies.

Grimper, who had slaved herself to death for so long in the service of the Falconers, was given a cottage and a pension as a reward for these faithful services, for Roy could guess from what had gone before, that her absence would be pleasanter than her grim presence to his bride, though Nora, in her sweet unselfishness, never complained of her.

Venables, who had done his best for all parties, and offended nobody except the unlucky Philip, was made a sort of majordomo of the establishment, with a large staff of servants under his control.

The barricades were taken away from the insides of the beautiful iron gates, for there was no longer anything to conceal, and no wish to keep friends at arms' length.

Andrews nearly broke his heart, when the young master suggested that he might like to retire on a pension.

"No, my lord," he said, with tears in his eyes. "I've only lived on here in the hope of seeing your face in the old house at last; and if you turn me off I shall die."

"Then stay by all means," said Roy, heartily, as he wrung the old servant's hand. "I only said it in case you might be tired of work."

The wedding was said to be the prettiest that had ever been held in Hillington church. Jack Prinsep was best man, and Lady Rose consented to be head bridesmaid, though she thought she had a prior claim to the bridegroom.

Roy, however, had made amends for his own defalcation the day before, by presenting her with the handsomest doll that was ever seen, which was dressed like a guardman, and quite cut him out as to the length of his monstaches.

Fred Sinclair looked as cheerful as ever, and by the end of the day had left his volatile heart in Lady Alice's safe keeping.

It was the general verdict that England might have been scoured from the Channel to the Cheviot Hills without finding a happier or a handsomer couple than Lord and Lady Mountfalcon.

[THE END.]

AN AFTER DINNER NAP.—Physicians now declare that any one who feels inclined to sleep after a meal is committing a crime against his digestion by not indulging his somnolency. The theory that these iconoclasts advance is, that when a person has taken a heavy dinner the stomach demands a special influx of blood wherewith to accomplish its work of digestion. The brain cannot meet this demand unless the cerebral functions be meanwhile partially or wholly suspended. Hence the benefit of "forty winks." The theory is one that will find many adherents and many converts, and the restless, energetic housekeepers, who seem to solve the problem of perpetual motion, should take a place in the foremost ranks. Dyspepsia will find this a very pleasant medicine, and if there are some who still think it an indolent practice, all we can hope for is their reformation.

POVERTY.

—O—

"Want is a bitter and a hateful good,
Because its virtues are not understood."

So we read in Dryden's oft-quoted couplet. And beautiful though it may be in theory—its precepts calling forth the Spartan qualities of endurance and resolution—but put them into practice, and very unsatisfactory will be found the "virtue" thereof.

Better can we understand Onida's definition, who, sympathizing with the fortunes of one of her characters, observes—"Poverty is a kind of blindness. We can only grope through life when we are poor."

And hear George Eliot in a like sentiment:

"The worst of misery
Is when a nature, framed for noblest things,
Condemns itself in youth to petty joys,
And sore athirst for air, breathes scanty life,
Gaspings from out the shallows."

And this, in our view, is one of the hardest forms of poverty—the inevitable repression—the crushing out of Life's sweetness, and the withering of its early flowers, whose bloom and fragrance no after sunshine can evermore restore.

Another phase, and perhaps the bitterest under which we may view this dire foe, is the dependence it entails. Who does not remember Dante's saddest of lines?

"Thou shalt by trial know what bitter fare
Is others' bread—how hard the path to go,
Upward and downward by another's stair."

There is yet a deeper sorrow, more heart-rending, even, than these—for they are but personal afflictions, and as such may be borne alone; but to look around one's impoverished home, helplessly and hopelessly, must surely be the climax of all suffering. "For," says Richter, "poverty is the only burthen which is not lightened by being shared with others."

And now having bewailed and bemoaned this calamity in our own words, and the more memorable ones of others, let us hail the laudation of a brave enthusiast, who discovers not only the virtues of poverty, but its powers and its grandeur:

"They have persecuted the good goddess, but they cannot debase her. She has taken refuge in the souls of poets, of peasants, of artists, of martyrs and of saints. Many a divine secret has she taught her children, for it is she who does all the greatest and most beautiful things that are done in the world."

"It is she who cultivates the fields and prunes the trees—who drives the herds to pasture, singing the while all sweet songs—who sees the daybreak and catches the sun's first smile."

"It is she who inspires the poet, who makes eloquent the musician, and who instructs the dexterous artisan, and teaches him to hew stone, to carve marble, to fashion gold and silver, copper and iron."

"It is she who supplies oil for the lamp, who reaps the harvest fields, kneads bread for us, weaves our garments in summer and winter, and who maintains and feeds the world."

"It is she who nurses us in infancy, succours us in sickness, and attends us to the silent sleeping place of death."

"Thou art all gentleness, all patience, all strength and all compassion. It is thou who dost renitify thy children in a holy love, givest them charity, faith, hope, oh, goddess of Poverty!"

E. A.

TRICKS OF MANNER.—If young people are allowed to condone, and express themselves carelessly at home, when in society, however much they are under control, little tricks of manner, slang words, &c., will come out. If mothers and fathers aim at their sons and daughters being refined and agreeable in society, they must begin by insisting on their being at home as courteous, as obliging, and as perfectly polite to each other as they would be to strangers.

CINDERELLA'S MARRIAGE.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DEATH WATCH.

There is something very depressing in the mere atmosphere of a sick house—the drawn blinds which exclude the gay sunlight, the hushed footsteps, the lowered voices, the anxious glances—all suggests that grim King of Terror whose advent we so much dread.

The London physician had been down to the Grange, had seen Miss Carbonnell, and had given his opinion. The injury to the spine, which had been the result from the railway accident, was the cause of the paralysis, and, in all probability, it would induce another and worse stroke. The third must eventually prove fatal, though the sufferer might linger on for weeks, or even months.

This was his ultimatum, for the pronouncing of which he charged fifty guineas, and having dined and made himself extremely agreeable, he went cheerfully back to London again, the cheque for the money in his pocket.

Lady Christabel had been present at the dinner, and after the departure of the physician, she sat in the drawing-room, thoughtfully contemplating the fire, and seeing in its visions of her own future.

The visions were not at all clear—indeed there was a vague uncertainty about them that she found far from pleasant, and her white forehead was creased into two fine up-right lines, as she sat in the rosy light, while the flames flickered and danced on the steel bars, and the wind moaned outside, and the ivy leaves tapped on the windows.

That there was no hope of Miss Carbonnell's ultimate recovery seemed pretty clear, and in the event of her death, what was to become of her half-niece? It seemed to Christabel that she would even be deprived of the shelter of the Grange, and she had nowhere else to go at present.

That Miss Carbonnell had made a will she knew, but she was in ignorance of its contents, although she had not much hope that she herself would be benefited; for three years ago, when she was presented at Court, her father had made a desperate appeal to his sister-in-law to advance him the money necessary for his daughter's dresses, and Miss Carbonnell had written to Christabel herself, enclosing a cheque for ten thousand pounds, and intimating in clear language that it was all the money she need ever expect.

"You are not my own niece," the old lady wrote, "and I do not recognise that you have any claim upon me. Nevertheless, I always intended leaving you ten thousand pounds, but as I think it may be of more use to you now than at my death, I send it, and thus free myself from all obligation towards you."

Not a very pleasant way of making a gift, but Christabel had swallowed the unpleasantness, as one swallows a gilded pill, and had rejoiced exceedingly at getting the money. Unfortunately, most of that money had found its way into the pockets of court milliners and jewellers, but the object for which it had been intended remained unachieved. Lady Christabel Kenmare was still Lady Christabel Kenmare.

"To whom will the money go?" mused the girl, and she gazed into the red heart of the fire. To Bertie, most probably, since he is now forgiven, and in favour again. Oh, why did I give him up?"

She wrung her hands together in an access of self-reproach. He could not have given her a coronet, it is true, but a hundred thousand pounds was not to be despised, especially now.

Her musings were interrupted by the striking of the clock on the mantelpiece, which chimed out eleven strokes. At the same moment she became aware of an unwonted stir and excitement—hurrying footsteps, raised voices, doors hastily opened and shut.

She went out into the hall to see what had happened, and then heard from one of the servants that Miss Carbonnell was worse. She had had another paralytic seizure, and it had deprived her both of speech, and all power of action. The doctor had been sent for, but it must be at least an hour before he could arrive.

Christabel went upstairs to the sick chamber, where she found Lucinda supporting the old lady, whose mouth was terribly distorted, and who looked a very pitiable object in her utter helplessness.

But, though her bodily faculties were thus impaired, her mind seemed quite clear, and she glared so angrily at her half-niece that the latter hastily drew back, and retired downstairs again, much discomfited.

There she was joined by Carbonnell, who forgot his grievance against her in the shock at his aunt's condition.

"By the way, Bertie," said the girl, suddenly, "you told Dr. Thwaites yesterday that Aunt Drusilla had made her will. You did not mean that old one that she made, disinheriting you?"

"Oh, no. The one I alluded to was executed yesterday afternoon."

"In your favour?"

"Well," Bertie answered, in some embarrassment, "it is not exactly in my favour."

"What do you mean by that?" sharply.

"I mean that Aunt Drusilla's property is not left to me."

"To whom, then?"

Bertie hesitated, not quite certain whether he ought to betray his knowledge of his aunt's intentions.

And yet, on the other hand, as Christabel occupied almost the same position with regard to the old lady as he did himself, it did not seem quite fair to keep her in ignorance.

"Well," he said, slowly, "I believe that by the will just executed my wife inherits everything."

It seemed rather a brutal thing to say, and Bertie looked away, so that in receiving the news Christabel should not be embarrassed by the consciousness of his gaze.

When he raised his eyes to her face he saw that she was very pale, but, to all outward seeming, quite self-possessed.

Inwardly, she was far from feeling calm. Her heart was hot with tumultuous rage and indignation.

Lucinda, that wail, that gutter girl, to become an heiress of money, most of which should by right belong to her!

She laughed, a low, harsh laugh, from which all the music had departed.

"Indeed! Your wife my aunt's heiress! I congratulate you!"

Bertie looked down, and seemed to be making a minute examination of his boots.

"It does not seem quite fair to you," he murmured, uneasily; "but no doubt some sort of arrangement may be—"

She interrupted him with a gesture full of hauteur.

"I make an arrangement with—your wife! You must be mad to suggest such a thing! Besides," shrugging her shoulders, "I never had any expectations of inheriting Aunt Drusilla's money. She always said she should leave it to you; and, when you were disinherited, she altered her will in favour of an hospital. Therefore I have no grounds of complaint."

She stirred the fire as she spoke, and remained kneeling on the rug for a few minutes, her face lighted up by the flames.

Presently, without raising her head, she said,—

"I suppose, if the old lady died without a will, you would inherit everything?"

"No. You and I would share equally."

Christabel lifted her delicate eyebrows.

"But I thought that males took precedence of females in the inheritance of property?"

"So they do, when the property is land; but nearly all Aunt Drusilla's money is

invested in railway securities, and that would be divisible in equal shares."

"Equal shares!" repeated the girl, thoughtfully. "I suppose that means about fifty thousand pounds each?"

"About that, I imagine."

Fifty thousand pounds! A large sum to lose by a mere fluke, as it were.

"Have you seen the will?" she asked, presently.

"No. All I know I have learned from my wife, who had it from Aunt Drusilla's own lips. Stay," he added, half smiling, "I am wrong to say I have not seen it, for I caught a glimpse of the corner when I went in Aunt Drusilla's bedroom this afternoon. She keeps it under her pillow."

Doctor Thwaites, when he came, said he was not surprised at being summoned, for he had expected nothing less. His account of the patient was not a favourable one.

"It is possible," he said, "that she may live for six or twelve months, but it will be a sort of living death, in all probability, for she will never be able to speak or move. There is no necessity for me to remain—I can do no good. Medical science is of no avail in such a crisis as this."

"Still," said Bertie, without looking up, "I understand you to say there is no immediate danger."

"No. Miss Carbonnell had a good constitution, and I do not think she will succumb readily. As I observed before, she may live for six months longer."

As Bertie raised his eyes, he met the glance of his wife who had stolen quietly in, and was standing at the door, looking fixedly at him. Involuntarily he coloured, for he knew she had read his thoughts, and he was ashamed of them.

"If she lives six months longer, then there is no hope of saving my good name,"—had been the idea that flashed despairingly through his mind—"I shall be posted up as a defaulter, and not all the money in the world will buy back my lost honour."

Yes. He was right. Lucinda had read his thoughts correctly, but she said nothing, and when the doctor withdrew, she went back to her old post in the sick chamber.

Before he retired to rest, he knocked gently at the door of Miss Carbonnell's chamber to hear the last news of the sick woman, and to bid his wife "good-night."

The light from one of the frosted globes in the passage fell on his face, and showed how white and haggard it had grown in these few days. He looked many years older.

"Poor Bertie!" murmured Lucinda, in a sad whisper. Then she added, "Don't despair—even yet there may be a way out of your troubles."

"If there is, I don't see it," he answered, gloomily. With a sudden impulse she threw her arms round his neck, and held him close to her.

"Oh, my love, my love!" she cried, "I would give my life—I would imperil my immortal soul if only I could help you!"

Wild words—wild, wicked words, spoken in the abandonment of a moment of passion, and destined to be visited with a terrible retribution!

With equal suddenness, she dropped her arms, and stood a few paces away. As she had been struck by his pallor and haggardness, so was he struck by hers.

"You have been sitting up too much with my aunt," he said. "Let the parlourmaid take your place to-night, and you go to bed and try to get some rest."

She shook her head, and though he pressed her, she still refused to give up her place by the bedside.

"Well, then," he observed, finally, "since you are so obstinate, I suppose you must go your own way. But at least I shall fetch you a glass of wine, it will help to pull you together a bit."

"I will fetch the wine," said Lady Christabel, who had come out of her room while

they were speaking, and overheard the last few words. "I was going down to get a glass for myself, for I have got neuralgia rather badly, and I can bring some up for Mrs. Carbonnell at the same time."

Bertie thanked her—for going up and down stairs was still a painful feat for him—and she proceeded to do her errand. She had got on a white dressing-gown, trimmed profusely with lace and swansdown, and her hair hung in a thick golden cloud over her shoulders.

Lucinda had drawn back as she appeared, blushing furiously at the idea that she must have overheard the whole of the conversation—for her room was close by, and the door was ajar.

Presently she came back, carrying a little silver tray, on which were placed two glasses of port wine. Bertie tried to relieve her of it, but she repulsed his efforts, and offered the wine to Cinderella herself.

"You must drink it up at once," said Carbonnell to his wife, "for if you take it inside the room you will probably forget all about it. I know you don't care for anything but water."

Lucinda obeyed with a faint smile, and made a wry face as she put the glass down.

"You take it as if it were a noxious medicine," observed Bertie, watching her.

"Well, it seems to me quite as nasty as any medicine," she responded. "But perhaps that is because I have never tasted port wine before. I certainly shall not take it again from choice."

The light was turned low in the sick chamber, the fire had burned down to a glowing mass, that threw out no dancing flames, and not a movement disturbed the silence that reigned. Lucinda had dismissed the maid who assisted her during the day, for she was going to keep her vigil alone.

There would probably be nothing to do, save indeed, administering beaten egg and brandy to the sick woman, who lay quite still, her eyes closed, and her hands—waxed in their pallor—lying on the rich crimson silk counterpane. She had not spoken since her seizure, and it was doubtful whether she was even yet conscious.

Lucinda stood for a moment by the bedside looking at her, gently smoothed the soft down pillows, and then sat down in an arm-chair near the fire, and took up a book—for it was only by reading that she managed to keep herself awake during these night watches.

But somehow, to-night, try as she would, she could not keep her attention fixed on the printed words. Bertie's miserable face came between them and her. What would he do in this dire strait—how could he preserve untarnished that honour that was dearer to him than life itself?

What a wild night it was again—how the wind howled and shrieked and sobbed! And what was that shrill hooting?

Lucinda almost started from her chair as the weird sound came whistling down the chimney, then she reassured herself and laughed at her superstitious fears. It was only an owl, whose nest was somewhere amongst the chimneys, hooting as he set out in the darkness in search of prey.

Suddenly there came a lull in the storm, the wind was still—resting for awhile after its wild rage was appeased. Coming after the noise and tumult of the elements, that strange calm seemed eerie, unnatural. Lucinda found herself wishing it would cease.

She let the book fall on her lap, and leaned back in her chair, looking thoughtfully into the dull red heart of the fire. Then she heard a strange little ticking sound close to her elbow. "Tick-tack, tick-tack, tick-tack!"

It was not a watch, no watch could produce that quite peculiarly still noise, which would occasionally cease for a moment, then go on again with its curiously monotonous ticking.

This was not the first time Lucinda had listened to the same noise. Once before, at Brussels, she had heard it, and the girls had

told her it was called the "Death watch." Strangely enough, one of the teachers had died shortly afterwards, and those who were superstitious had recalled the ominous warning of the death watch.

This remembrance flashed into Lucinda's mind as she sat there alone in the darkened room, in the hush of the November night, and she shivered in spite of herself. Then she smiled at her own foolishness.

"Frightened of a spider!" she murmured, aloud. "I am worse than any school girl."

A sudden gust of wind came, rattling the windows and sending a shower of dust and mortar flying down the chimney; the beat of the little spider was drowned in the commotion, and when it had subsided, the ticking was no longer audible.

Lucinda wondered how it was she felt so drowsy to-night, and supposed her vigils in the sick-room were telling on her more than she imagined. She dipped her handkerchief in the jug of cold water and wrapped it round her brow, but it was of no avail. In spite of all her efforts her eyelids drooped over her tired eyes, her hand fell inertly at her side. She slept.

The night wore on. The wind had dropped somewhat, and instead of raging furiously as it had during the earlier hours, it went wailing through the gaunt boughs of the leafless trees like some human creature in direful agony. The fire burned lower and lower, down to a mere handful of dull red cinders, and the tired girl in the chair still slept on, heedless of the duties she had taken on herself, and had failed to perform.

Between two and three o'clock the door was pushed gently open—so gently that only a strained ear could have caught the sound it made. A figure robed in white stood on the threshold, the door handle still in its hand—watching, waiting.

Encouraged by the perfect stillness, the figure came in, with footsteps as soft as velvet, and closed the door; then it advanced a few steps farther into the room, but keeping carefully out of the radius of the lamplight.

Its first action was to bend close over the sleeping girl and listen to her breathing; after that, apparently satisfied, it went to the bedside, and stood for a few minutes looking intently at its occupant.

Miss Carbonnell's eyes were closed, but her breathing was stronger and more regular than it had been a few hours ago. Her face, too, was rather less distorted, although the mouth was still considerably drawn to one side.

Very slowly, very carefully the intruder inserted one hand underneath the pillow, and groped about until it apparently found something it wanted, then—whether in the elation of grasping it or in the hurry to withdraw it cannot be said, but certainly the pillows were jerked a little—and Miss Carbonnell opened her eyes.

Opened her eyes and met those of this nocturnal visitor, whose guilty white face told its own story. Then a strange, forced sort of cry burst from the paralysed woman's lips, and in a perfect frenzy of terror, the other put one strong white hand over the poor drawn mouth and held it there. After that, all was still again.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"MURDER!"

THE shadowy dawn was just breaking—faint slants of daylight were coming in through the drawn blinds, lending all objects a strange ghostly sort of unrealness, when Lucinda woke from her deep slumber. The fire was out, and the cold grey ashes in the grate told that it must have been some hours since it was attended to; the oil of the lamp, too, had become exhausted, and the wick was flickering faintly before its final extinction.

For a few minutes the girl gazed bewilderedly around, not quite conscious of her

surroundings. Then she remembered everything, and was filled with keen self-reproach for her neglect. How had the poor sick woman fared while her nurse was thus ungratefully oblivious of her duties?

But while Lucinda felt very indignant with herself, she felt at the same time, very much surprised that she should have slept so long and so soundly. Such a thing was quite a new experience for her, for as a rule, she was an extremely light sleeper, and could trust herself to awake at any given time.

She fancied it must have been the wine that had taken effect on her—port was heavy, and she was unaccustomed to it, or, indeed, to any sort of alcohol.

Approaching the bed, she drew the curtains on one side, and leaned down over the patient. How still she was, and what a strange expression her features wore! Her face looked quite horrible.

Lucinda was a little startled, and listened intently. There was no sign of breathing. Then she touched the hand lying over the counterpane. It was cold as ice, and the fingers were clenched together as if in some convulsive struggle.

This was strange, for since her seizure the day before Miss Carbonnell had been incapable of action, and last night all her fingers were outstretched.

Lucinda remembered noticing them as they lay on the crimson satio, and thinking what a cruel mockery were the gemmed rings she wore, and which she never took off night or day.

"Miss Carbonnell," she said, softly, and then repeated the name more loudly.

There was no answer—not a movement of the face, not a quiver of the eyelids. A cold fear struck on Lucinda's heart. Was this death?

Yes. There could be no doubt of it. In the night the spirit had winged its flight, and all that was left of Miss Carbonnell was cold, senseless clay.

A low cry broke from the girl's lips, and she fell on her knees by the bedside.

"She is dead, and through me!" she cried, aloud in her agony of self-reproach, for she really thought that the poor woman had died through lack of the stimulants that it had been her duty to administer. "Oh, Heaven, forgive me—I have killed her—I have killed her!"

In her self-absorption she did not notice that a little tap had been given at the door, which was presently opened to admit no less a person than Doctor Thwaites, who had been up all night with a case in the neighbourhood, and had called in at the Grange on his way home to see how Miss Carbonnell was progressing.

He was just in time to hear those ominous words, spoken in an accent of bitter self-reproach.

"I have killed her—I have killed her!"

He paused for a moment, too surprised to go on, and looked into the death chamber, which was now illumined by the cold pallor of the morning light.

Even with that, however, things seemed dim and shadowy, for the blinds were still down, and the fireplace looked wretchedly desolate with its few grey embers.

By the bed still knelt that black-robed figure, her head buried in the bedclothes, and her whole attitude instinct with—guilt, it seemed to the doctor's eyes.

In a minute or two he crossed the threshold, and his first action was to go to the window and draw up the blinds, then he came to the bedside and looked down at the dead woman.

"Good Heavens!" he cried, "she has been strangled!"

At those awful words Lucinda sprang to her feet, and stared at the speaker in dumb horror.

"Mrs. Carbonnell," said the doctor, turning to her after a moment's pause, "this is a very terrible business, can you explain it?"

"Explain it!" repeated Lucinda, stupidly.

"How should I be able to explain it? But oh! it cannot be true—it cannot—it cannot!"

"I tell you it is. Don't you see the swollen and blackened features—don't you see the froth on the lips? There can be no doubt about it. Miss Carboneil has met her death by foul means."

Lucinda sank down on the nearest chair, trembling in all her limbs, and unable to articulate a word. A cloud of doubt and horror seemed to envelop her—she felt oppressed, stifled—unable to breathe.

The doctor cast one glance on her, then left the room, and rapped loudly on Bertie's door, which was a little way down the passage on the opposite side.

"Get up, Captain Carboneil, you are wanted!" he called out through the keyhole.

"Who wants me?" asked a lazy voice from inside.

"I do—Doctor Thwaites."

The answer seemed to startle Bertie, for he leapt out of bed, put on slippers and dressing gown, and was in the passage almost directly.

"What's up?" he asked. "Is my aunt worse?"

"She is dead!" was the brief rejoinder.

Bertie looked unfeignedly shocked.

"Poor thing! It is awfully sudden at the last."

"It is not only its suddenness that is so terrible," observed Doctor Thwaites, with unconscious sternness, "it is the manner of it, Captain Carboneil. Your aunt has been murdered!"

Bertie stared at him, as Lucinda had done, and seemed not to comprehend his words.

"I repeat," went on the physician, slowly and doggedly, "your aunt has been murdered!"

"By whom?"

"Ah! that we shall have to find out!" returned the other, shaking his head. "We must look for the motive, and that will perhaps lead us to the author of the crime."

While speaking, he had led the way to Miss Carboneil's chamber, where they found Lucinda standing in the middle of the room, her face quite white, and her arms hanging straight down at her side. She carefully avoided meeting Bertie's gaze, and as he drew back the curtain to look at the swollen and discoloured features of the corpse, the young girl slipped unnoticed from the apartment.

After looking, the young man drew back with an irrepressible shudder. And, indeed, the sight was a very dreadful one. There was none of that placid repose which marks the peaceful departure of the tired soul from its earthly tenement—instead of this, there were evidences of a violent struggle, and all the features, independently of their discolouration, were fierce and repellent.

"Are you quite sure that natural causes may not have produced these effects?" he asked, presently, in a troubled voice—unwilling to accept the terrible alternative suggested by the doctor.

The latter shook his head.

"I am quite sure. It is possible that if Miss Carboneil had been an apoplectic subject these appearances might have been accounted for, but she was not—had not the slightest tendency towards apoplexy. However the post-mortem will put an end to all possibility of doubt."

"The post-mortem!" repeated Bertie, startled.

"Certainly. There must be a post-mortem examination. You do not think I could give a certificate of death under such suspicious circumstances?"

"But an after death examination is so very dreadful," murmured the young man, in a distressed voice. "I have often heard my aunt say how repellent it would be to her feelings to have any one she cared for, subjected to the dissecting knife."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Very likely. Women frequently have those weak ideas."

"It's a weakness that I confess to sharing," observed Bertie, as with reverent hand he drew the sheet up, so as to cover the ghastly face on the pillow.

"Well," said the medical man, with some emphasis, "you must admit that it would not be right to let sentimental considerations interfere with the course of justice."

"No, no! Certainly not."

"And justice demands that the murderer, whoever he may be, should be discovered, and pay the penalty of his crime," went on Doctor Thwaites, still in the same judicial tone. "You are now the representative of your deceased aunt, and master of the house—at least until the will is read."

"The reading of the will will not make any special difference in my position," returned Bertie, quietly.

"Ah!" Doctor Thwaites cast upon him a sharp glance out of his keen grey eyes. "You are aware of the contents, then?"

"Yes."

"And your aunt has—very properly—named you as her heir?"

"Not me, but it amounts to much the same thing, as my wife is universal legatee." The doctor started, but recovered himself at once.

"Indeed! you surprise me. However, I was about to observe that your best plan will be to lock this door, take possession of the key, and let no one approach the corpse until you have to show it to some representative of the police. I will call in at the county constabulary on my way home, and tell them to send an officer over without delay."

Bertie assented mechanically. For himself he had not yet sufficiently recovered from the effects of the shock to think of what was right and proper to be done under such exceptional circumstances, and it was a relief to have someone to make the necessary suggestions.

He and the doctor went outside, and Bertie locked the door of the death chamber, and put the key in his pocket. Then the two went downstairs, where the servants were at work with their brooms, brushes, and pails. They looked curiously at the two men as they passed into the library, and some instinct made them gather that something was wrong.

"I have another suggestion to make," observed the doctor, who had been jotting down a few notes in his pocket-book. "It is that you do not permit anyone to leave the house until the police arrive, neither the servants nor any member of your family. It is just as well to be on the safe side, you know."

He drew on his gloves, and a few minutes later drove off in his professional looking-gig. Once he turned back to look at the Grange, whose upper windows were visible above the tree tops. Already the blinds were pulled down, in token of the dread presence within.

The doctor shook his head gloomily. He had known the Carboneil family for many years, and had entertained a great respect for the late mistress of the Grange.

"There's trouble in store," he muttered to himself, "you, trouble and disgrace as well, or else I'm mistaken."

After his departure it suddenly occurred to Bertie that he had not spoken to his wife that morning, and he limped upstairs and knocked at her room door. There was no answer to his knock, and he turned the handle, with the result of finding the door locked.

"Cinderella!" he called out, stooping down and putting his mouth to the keyhole. "Let me in. I want to speak to you."

A minute or two later the door was opened, and Lucinda stood on the threshold facing him. There was something startling in her appearance; she was very white, and on her features there lay a peculiar rigidity which added at least ten years to her age, and made her curiously unlike herself. Bertie felt an involuntary shock as he saw her.

"Are you ill?" was his first question, as he followed her in.

She shook her head, but did not speak, and

he seated himself in a chair near the table while she still remained standing, her hands hanging loosely in front of her, her eyes fixed on vacancy.

"I was going to ask you what you know concerning my aunt's death," the young man began, but she interrupted him with a low cry of terror.

"Ask me nothing—ask me nothing!" she exclaimed, wildly, and throwing out her hands with a piteous gesture of appeal. "I can throw no light on it, and questions would only torture me."

"Lucinda!"

His accent was so surprised, his eyes were fixed upon her with a gaze of such undiagnosed amazement, that it seemed to reach her to herself. She grew a little more composed; but the strange expression of terrified alertness still remained on her features. She sank down on a chair, and covered her face with her hands, trembling violently.

"I can understand that you should be shocked and upset by this terrible business," went on Bertie, gently, "but at the same time you must remember that it entails very serious duties and responsibilities. You have heard what Doctor Thwaites says?"

She made the slightest possible gesture of assent without, however, raising her eyes.

"Who is the author of this crime, it is, at present, quite impossible to guess," the young man continued. "To the best of my belief my aunt had no enemies. She was good and kind, and if not generous, she was at least just. To me the horror of the deed is increased tenfold by the thought that she was already on the very verge of the grave—for the doctors agreed that if she lingered on for another six months, it would only be a species of living death. The man or woman who could take a life like that—who could strike a blow at a helpless creature utterly incapable of defending herself"—Bertie brought his hand down heavily on the table in order to emphasise his words—"I say, that man or woman is outside the pale of humanity and deserves no mercy!"

Lucinda did not move, but a quick shudder thrilled through all her limbs.

"Don't you agree with me?" asked her husband, a little impatiently.

"I don't know—I can't say," she muttered, with some incoherence. "One cannot measure the power of another person's temptation."

Bertie looked incredulous.

"I am afraid I have less toleration than you," he said, "for I certainly cannot even attempt any sort of palliation. It all seems to me like a horrible dream—even yet I cannot realise the fact that a murder has been committed. However, I suppose some more light will be thrown on the matter when the police arrive."

"The police!"

Lucinda raised her head now, and stared at him with widely dilated eyes.

"Have you sent for the police?" she asked in a voice hardly raised above a whisper.

"I have not, but Doctor Thwaites is going to call at the county constabulary on his way home, and I expect a detective here almost directly. I should not wonder," he added, as a low ring was heard at the front door, "if that does not mean that the man has arrived."

He rose from his seat, and took a step towards the door, when, with a sudden passionate movement, Lucinda flung herself in front of him so as to intercept his progress.

"Bertie!" she cried, in quick, gasping sentences that of themselves were sufficient to bear witness to her extreme agitation, "send this man away—don't let him come inside the house! If a crime has indeed been committed, do your best to hide it; but, for Heaven's sake, don't let it be made public! If you have the police here—if an investigation is made, and the guilty person is brought to justice, you will never forgive yourself—never—never—never!"

She was on her knees now, her hands upraised as if in prayer, her accents wild and imploring, her whole attitude instinct with a very abandonment of supplication. She seemed carried out of herself by the force of a torrent of feeling that swept her forward like an irresistible current.

"My dear child," said Bertie, after a minute's pause of astonishment, "you don't know what you are saying. You are tired, frightened, overwrought. Get up and rest for awhile, and I will talk to you later on."

"Later on!" she repeated, wringing her hands together in impatient distress. "Later on means—too late! If you once put this matter in the hands of the police they will go on to the bitter end, and until the guilty person is discovered."

"Certainly they will," he responded, calmly. "That is what they will be here for, and that is what I desire above all things. Is it not right that the guilty person should be brought to justice?"

"Yes, in the abstract I suppose it is; but justice is hard—cold—seldom tempered with mercy, and is a thing of this kind there are so many considerations to think of."

"I don't agree with you. So far as I am concerned there is but one consideration, and that is the punishment of crime."

"I know—I know!" she exclaimed, with another quick gesture of her hands. "All you say is right, and yet—and yet—you don't understand where it will lead you!"

She was still on her knees between him and the door, and he was struck dumb by her wild and disconcerted appearance.

It will be remembered that since the night before she had not made her toilette, and her hair, disarranged by her restless sleep, had now escaped its fastenings, and hung down over her shoulders in thick, shining coils.

Her eyes were heavy and darkened by black circles below the underlids, and every vestige of colour had forsaken her face. Her dress, too, was disordered, and displayed none of that scrupulous neatness that generally characterized it—altogether, she was the very antithesis of her usual self.

What her husband would have said is not destined to be known, for at that precise moment there came a knock at the door, and a servant announced that Superintendent Davies had arrived.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"MR. DAVIES DECLINES THE RESPONSIBILITY."

Bertie gave orders that the detective should be brought upstairs, and as the maid left the room to obey the command, Lucinda rose and went towards the door leading to the dressing-room.

"Where are you going?" Bertie asked, rather sharply. "There is no reason why you should leave while Davies is here."

"I thought perhaps it would be better for you to see him alone," the girl responded, with some timidity.

"By no means. He will want all particulars which it is possible to furnish with regard to my aunt's death, and as you know a good deal more than I do, your presence will be necessary."

Without another word Lucinda repeated herself and resumed her former attitude. As a matter of fact, in addition to mental anxiety, the girl was physically exhausted, for she had not been feeling well for the last few days, and the terrible events of the past night had utterly unnerved her.

Presently the policeman came in—a short, sandy-haired, light-eyed man, who blinked like an owl in the sunshine, and seemed to think Nature had been too bountiful to him in the matter of hands, for these appendages were decidedly of the shoulder of mutton order, and he appeared to have great difficulty in disposing of them to his satisfaction. But for a certain quick, furtive gleam in those

light grey eyes of his, one might have thought him an altogether stupid country bumpkin—but this opinion would have been a mistake.

"Doctor Thwaites called in, sir, and I happened to be there at the time," he observed, respectfully to Bertie, as he stood near the door, twisting his hat in both hands, "so I thought I might as well come."

At another time Bertie would have smiled at this odd introduction; but he was a great deal too grave to smile now.

"Doctor Thwaites told you that Miss Carbonnell was dead?" he said, interrogatively.

Davies assented with a movement of his head—he was not a man of many words—perhaps experience had taught him the value of golden silence!

"I ought to have said murdered!" went on Bertie, in a lower tone, and Davies observed that a quick shudder stirred the limbs of the young wife as her husband pronounced the dread word. "I suppose, however, the doctor has given you some particulars?"

For answer, the policeman whipped out a dirty-looking memorandum book, the leaves of which he turned rapidly, until he came to a particular page.

"I understand," he said, in a peculiarly short, dry voice, whose monotony was unbroken by any change of inflection. "I understand that Miss Carbonnell was ill, and not expected to recover—that is to say, that the doctor thought she might live for six months or so, but that she would never regain full possession of her faculties. Am I right, or not, sir?"

"Quite right!"

"When the doctor left her last night he saw no special change in her condition," went on Davies, still continuing to read from the greasy pocket book, "and Mrs. Carbonnell offered to sit up with her—am I right in supposing that lady"—indicating Lucinda with a wave of his hand—"to be Mrs. Carbonnell?"

Bertie assented, and the policeman bestowed a sharp, though furtive glance on the young wife.

"Madam," said the policeman, turning to her, "will you be good enough to tell me what occurred during the night?"

Lucinda started nervously, and seemed more perturbed by the question than there was any necessity for.

It was fully a minute before she replied, and then her voice was low and hesitating, she spoke like a person anxious not to betray herself by any hasty admission.

"I am afraid I can't render you much assistance," she said, moistening her dry lips, "for I was overcome by sleep last night, and I did not wake until between seven and eight o'clock this morning."

Davies raised his eyebrows, and, indeed, the confession was sufficiently astonishing. Bertie, with an idea of excusing his wife for a neglect of the duty she had taken upon herself, said rather hastily,—

"My wife had been nursing Miss Carbonnell for some time, and she has been robbed of her proper rest lately. It was not unnatural that she should fall asleep in the night."

"Perhaps not," was the dubious assent; "but it was strange she should sleep the whole night through, was it not?"

Neither Bertie nor Lucinda made any reply, indeed, to have done so, would have been difficult under the circumstances, although Bertie was inclined to resent the tone in which the remark was made.

Davies returned to his business-like perusal of his pocket-book, hitting at the same time at the end of a dirty little stump of pencil with which he was provided.

"Who else is in the house, may I ask, besides yourselves and the servants?" he queried, presently.

"My cousin, Lady Christabel Kenmare."

The policeman repeated the name with a sort of unctuous pleasure, as if the title pleased him. Then he said,—

"Might I be permitted to see her ladyship?"

"Certainly," responded Bertie, and he rang the bell, and gave the servant who answered it orders to request the presence of Lady Christabel.

During the maid's absence on her errand, the trio sat in complete silence, Bertie, gazing abstractedly out of the window, Lucinda with downcast eyes and listless mien, the policeman watching them both as intently as a cat watches a mouse.

Outside, the bare branches tossed restlessly in the raw air, like gaunt, skeleton arms; the wind moaned round the house with the low, eerie sound that is so much more melancholy than the loudest and most violent blustering; the grey skies threatened rain, and ever and anon a few drops fell heavily on the dank earth. On one of the boughs just outside the window a robin was singing a sad little dirge for the death of the glad summer-time.

Presently Lady Christabel came in. She was very pale, and her palmor was accentuated by a white cambric tea-gown she wore, lavishly trimmed with lace and a few black satin bows.

All the same, her toilette had been made with some care, for her hair was dressed with its usual elaboration, and seemed to make a halo of brightness as she entered the room.

Without appearing to notice the stranger, she went straight up to Bertie, both hands outstretched, and a piteous terror in her blue eyes.

"Oh, Bertie! Bertie! what has happened? The servants tell me my aunt is dead! and they hint at something still more dreadful! Is it true?"

Her distress and bewilderment were so great that they touched Bertie, who, as we know, was the very essence of chivalry where a woman was concerned.

He made room for her on the couch beside him, and soothed her in a few gentle words while he broke the news to her.

She covered her face with her hands, and seemed actually stunned by the revelation of the murder.

"Who can have been so vile, so wicked?" she murmured, in a whisper.

"That is just what we want to find out, my lady," observed Davies, putting in his word briskly, but respectfully; "and we think perhaps you can help us?"

"I?" she repeated, drawing back with an instinctive movement of horror. "How can I help you?"

"By telling us all you know."

"I know nothing! nothing at all! The last time I saw my poor aunt was yesterday morning, and then only for a minute. I have not been in her room since."

Davies looked disappointed. For some reason or other he had been counting on Lady Christabel's testimony as likely to aid him very considerably in his researches.

He bit his lip, and did not speak for a few seconds.

Lucinda raised her heavy eyes, and fixed them on Lady Christabel, who, at the policeman's question, had instinctively drawn closer to Bertie, and laid one slender white hand on his sleeve, as if appealing to him for protection.

The faintest possible tinge of colour rose to the young wife's cheek, and she averted her gaze almost immediately.

"I think, sir, if you agree, I'll see the servants now, and question them," observed Davies, rising from his seat as he spoke. "Neither of the two ladies seem to be able to give me any information."

"Surely Mrs. Carbonnell can tell you something!" exclaimed Christabel, in apparent surprise. "She has been with my aunt all along."

"Yes," returned Davies, drily; "only, unfortunately, Mrs. Carbonnell was asleep during the time the murder was committed."

"Asleep! Then," said Christabel, turning to Lucinda, "you are as ignorant as I am?"



[CAPTAIN CARBONNELL TOOK A STEP TOWARDS THE DOOR, WHEN, WITH A SUDDEN MOVEMENT, LUCINDA FLUNG HERSELF IN FRONT OF HIM!]

"I was asleep," returned the young girl, briefly; and then Davies left the room, followed by Bertie. And the servants were all put through a rigid cross examination, the result of which tended to prove their perfect innocence of all complicity in the crime.

"I don't fancy any of them know anything at all about it," Davies confided to Captain Carbonnell, scratching his head dubiously while he gave the opinion. "You see, sir, they all sleep in a different wing of the house. And then, again, there is an absence of motive, since no robbery was committed. Why, there isn't a servant in the house who hasn't been with your aunt for over ten years!"

This was true, and, moreover, Miss Carbonnell had been a good mistress, and her domestics were sincerely attached to her. Their grief at her death was as great as their horror at the means that had brought it about.

Davies carefully examined all the exits from the house, and looked to see if there were any footmarks in the mould of the garden that would tend to prove that an entrance had been effected from the outside. The opinion he came to was that such was not the case, as there was not a sign of a footprint, and as the soil was, and had been, wet for some days, it followed as a necessity that if anyone had tried to break into the house they would have left traces of their attempt.

"I'll be candid with you, sir," said the policeman, when at length he returned to Bertie in the library. "This affair puzzles me. I can't make head nor tail of it, and I would rather somebody else took the responsibility."

Bertie looked hard at him, for there was something in the man's manner that he could not quite fathom. Davies appeared not only vexed, but uneasy, and Carbonnell fancied that his desire to shift the responsibility from his own shoulders, had in it something

deeper than mere doubt of his ability to elucidate the mystery.

"You don't think the servants were concerned in this?" he asked, after a minute's pause.

The policeman shook his head.

"No, sir, I do not. You see, I myself am a native of Rodwell, and there is not a man or maid amongst the Grange household that I haven't known from childhood, and whom I don't believe incapable of repaying their mistress's kindness with such base ingratitude. No, sir, I don't believe the servants had anything to do with the murder."

In his heart Bertie echoed this opinion, for he, too, had known the servants from childhood, and held them to be trustworthy.

"What can I do?" he asked, in a sort of desperation.

Davies thought for a few minutes before he replied, then he said,—

"If I were you, I should send up to Scotland Yard for a detective. This is just one of those cases where a stranger is likely to find out more than a man as is well acquainted with the place."

There seemed to Bertie some justice in this remark, and the recollection of Hosea Gott flashed into his mind.

Yes! he would send for him. Gott would ferret out the mystery if anyone could, and besides, it would be better to have him in the house than a complete stranger.

When he mentioned the detective's name to Davies the latter nodded approval.

"Couldn't have a better man," he observed. "I've never seen him, but I've heard a goodish bit about him, and from that I should think he's exactly the right person for this sort of thing. I would lose no time in sending for him if I were you, sir."

So the telegram to Scotland Yard was sent without delay.

(To be continued.)

A CAMEL MARKET.—Nearly three hundred thousand camels pass in and out of Aden, Arabia, every year laden with the various products of the interior. The camel market is a large space devoted to the sale and purchase of the camel-loads as they are brought in. Every morning hundreds of laden camels come streaming in from the interior. Filing into the camel market they lay down beneath their loads in the place assigned them and complacently chew the cud or ruminate on the subject of their woes, while a motley crowd of merchants, middlemen and traders circulate among them, bargaining and chaffering over the piles of firewood, charcoal and fodder under which they are almost hidden, or for the bales of hides and skins, the bags of coffee, or of country produce for the city market.

How Roses Bloom.—Hybrid perpetual roses bloom mostly upon shoots that grow from the old wood; that is, canes of one or more year's growth. The best blooms are found upon the canes which start from near the root the previous season. Therefore, it is best every spring to cut out all canes which have bloomed one season. As you value good roses and a quantity of them do not fail to do this. To increase the quantity and richness of bloom with hybrid perennials practise what is called "pegging down." This is to bend all the canes that have been left after pruning nearly to the ground. The outermost ones may be within six inches of the surface and the others a little higher. This horizontal position of the canes somewhat retards the flow of the sap as it returns to the roots, and more of it is used in forming buds and flowers. If you prefer to grow your roses upright, do not fail to cut back the canes about one-half. If you wish to have seed for new varieties, it is well not to have the soil too rich, else, according to my experience, you will get fewer seeds and not the best roses. All the roses should be where they will have plenty of sunlight, and yet be protected from high winds.



[STANDING BESIDE THE BED, THE WIDOWED EDITH FOUND HERSELF A BRIDE AGAIN.]

NOVELETTE.]

EDITH'S DILEMMA.

CHAPTER I.

"ALGY! Algy! this cruel silence is breaking my heart; four weary months have come and gone, and not one line have you sent me to ease my anxiety," sighed Lady Edith Vernon, as she paced the soft damp sands, and gazed yearningly out to the grey sea, which gurgled at her feet in soft white little billows that looked for all the world like ridges of virgin snow.

Her eyes, darkly blue, resembling dew spangled violets, were sweeping the horizon bedimmed with tears that at last fell in hot, scalding drops on her slender hands that were clasped together in pitiful sorrow.

Her hair, just caught by the healthful spring wind, tossed about her face in a ruddy golden cloud, and fell about her in wild luxuriance, as if she took little heed of her beauty now that she was fretting for a form and a voice far away.

Her thoughts had spanned oceans, lands, and even deserts, and penetrated into that far region, West Africa, where her venturesome husband, led by his love of adventure and sport, had betaken himself.

"If I only knew," she moaned. "It is this sickening suspense which is so hard to bear!"

The beauty of the scene was lost upon her; its white cliffs and leafy ravine which parted the dark slate coloured rocks that were nearly hidden by greenery, where the birds built their nests and sang their love ditties to their sweet-hearts and wives.

So abstracted was Lady Vernon with her distressful thoughts, that the figure of a young woman with fluttering pink ribbons flying

from her cap, caught by the fresh sea breeze, came, panting for breath, and stood in her presence before she even saw her.

"My lady, I've run so fast, please, because Mr. Reeves has just come, and sent me to tell you, he says it's important," she gabbled breathlessly.

"Mr. Reeves, Deborah! why should he come here?" she asked, a spasm of pain and terrible foreboding clutching at her heart, chilling it with a dull, cold dread which her lips refused to shape, as she with tottering steps, left the smiling rippling sea for the shore, where, peeping through a rift of verdant foliage stood a delightful bungalow kind of a house; whose woods, clustering around it, were alive with the ravishing songs of myriads of birds—larks, thrushes, and bullfinches—while mingling with their delightful songs came the cuckoo's greeting to the dwellers of the fair green earth, that summer was nigh, and chill biting winds had fled for a few brief months.

As her ladyship entered the porch, which was a tangled skein of climbing creepers, a thoughtful gentlemanly man stepped forward, his face wearing a pitiful anxious expression.

"What is the matter, Mr. Reeves?" she stammered, her lovely young face ashen in its pallor. "I feel sure something has happened; do not, I implore you, keep me in suspense!"

Very gently he led her into the pretty drawing-room, where the sweet odour of countless flowers tried to outvie each rival's delicious scent.

"Lady Vernon, I dare not deny my errand here is a sad one, but try and summon all your strength to bear it with fortitude for, indeed, you will need to!"

"My husband," she gasped, "he—he is dead, I know it, I can see it in your face," and she awayed forward like a tossed reed caught in a sudden fierce hurricano.

He bowed his head in reply; he felt unable to repeat the unhappy truth.

"He fell a victim to his undaunted courage and love of adventure," he observed, breaking the awful silence. "Savages are treacherous and cruel."

"And they have murdered my darling!" she added. "Oh, Algy! how I begged of you to give up that wild project; oh, my martyred husband!" holding her trembling hands tight to her heart to stop its mad agonising pain.

"The dispatch which tells the sad news says that his valet, poor Conrad, shot himself, and thus escaped the inhuman torture of his captors; may not Lord Vernon have followed his example; let us hope so, at least."

"If I could only think so," she sobbed, "even that would be one ray of comfort, even that," and the rings on her soft white hands gleamed mockingly that he had placed there with such pride a few short months back.

"My task is not, I regret to say, completed," he observed, after a painful pause, clearing his throat. "Misfortune has indeed fallen on the house of Vernon. My late client's brother, who, of course, is the next heir, lies at Vernon Park dying."

"Dying!" she repeated, aghast. "Is my cup of bitterness not full yet? Widowed and comparatively a beggar, and all in a few short months!"

"It is to avert, in some measure, the last catastrophe that I am here to-day especially. Your brother-in-law has entrusted me with a mission; in fact, to conduct you to Vernon Park immediately."

"For what purpose?" she faltered, stemming with difficulty the tears that would persist in running down her cheeks.

"You know what will happen at the death of Lord Vernon? The whole of the estates and property reverts to a man whom both brothers detest; and, I believe, not without cause."

"How can this heir be kept out of the property, if it is his right, Mr. Reeves?"

"By stratagem, Lady Vernon. We lawyers are sometimes called upon, for their clients' interests, to use the subtle cunning of the fox to gain a point. As the widow of the late lord you only receive one-third of the income now in the funds. The magnificent estates would be lost; but, as the widow of the late Vernon, he can bequeath everything to you."

"I don't understand!" she protested, in wondering perplexity.

"I am I must be more explicit," clearing his throat to plunge into the task which he felt was not an easy one with such a guileless, candid nature as this girl-widow, who was as open and frank as the glorious sunshine that was dancing through the windows gleefully in its merriest mood.

"Lord Vernon's last wish is to marry you before his death, so that you may inherit the property."

"Marry me!" she murmured in amazement, a burning flush suffusing the beautiful face that an instant before was the hue of passive marble.

"It will only be a matter of form. The doctors have given up all hopes of his recovery," Mr. Reeves rejoined, quickly.

"But I am a perfect stranger to him! He has never even seen me!" she persisted.

"What does that matter, my lady? He knows his brother was devoted to you; and he has heard your true character, and thinks you a lady worthy of the high position he now wishes to confer upon you on his dying bed."

"Why should he wish to benefit a person so utterly unknown to him?" she questioned, incredulously.

"For the sake of his brother, whom he loved dearer than anything in life; and his illness, no doubt, was accelerated by the shock of his sudden death."

"And he wants me to accompany you to Vernon Park?" she observed, in a half-dazed tone, for the interview was almost too harrowing for her to bear in her widowed sorrow and keen anguish much longer.

"Yes. Will you consent?"

"I know not what to say?" a fresh burst of sobbing choked her utterance. "It is all so unreal, so cruel! and I am alone, with no one to turn to for advice. Heaven guide me right in this step you ask me to take!"

"How free from ambition this beautiful, child-like woman is!" the man of the world thought with increased admiration. "Not even the dazzling prospect of becoming one of the richest peeresses in England moves her one whit."

Aloud he said gravely,—

"Remember, it is a dying man's wish; and that man your husband's only kith and kin. And now permit me to wait ten minutes for your decision?"

"You need not give me that, Mr. Reeves. I have already decided I will come with you. My dear husband's brother's last wish shall not be disregarded by me."

He opened the door and watched the pearl and grey clad figure float out into the hall, her beautiful head, in its tangle of gold, bowed down with a grief too crushing even for the good-natured domestic who, on the alert, felt sure that some terrible calamity had fallen on either her young mistress too sacred to question or her friends upon.

Deborah, in silence, followed her to her room, and with dexterous haste carried out her hurried instructions and dressed her for the journey.

"Come to Ransom's and order mourning for you, Edith said, as the girl clasped a warm cloak around her, lined with sable, the last presents Lord Vernon had given her, telling her with a gay little laugh that she was only a wee birdie that required a coat of fur till her own feathers made their appearance.

"Oh! my lady, then it is too true," and Edith never saw our dear master again," faltered Deborah, no longer able to hold her peace.

"Please do not make it too hard for me to endure. I am starting on a journey and am ill," her mistress urged in a weak voice, tottering towards the door.

"My lady, do I beseech you, drink a glass of wine or something," she entreated, looking at the agonized face with a world of tenderness in her kind grey eyes.

"Yes, I want strength to travel, Deborah. I was forgetting," this with a childish yielding that was touching to witness, as she swallowed a glass of port, and then hastened down to the drawing-room, where Mr. Reeves was anxiously awaiting the flying moments, resolute in hand, knowing the necessity of reaching London, where they had to catch another train, and endure forty minutes' more travelling, as they could reach the dying man's bedside.

Lady Vernon sat back in the furthestmost corner of the railway carriage, lost in a dawning stupor of despairing misery, while her companion engaged his attention in his newspaper, leaving the bereaved young widow would rather be left to her own thoughts.

Like a rift of summer sunlight piercing a dark tomb came the memory of that bright May-day when she first met her fate at a botanical fête, and Lord Vernon presented her with the bouquet of roses he had taken a first prize for, and stole her heart in exchange, luring her by the witchery of his fine presence and dark, passionate eyes—eyes that gazed her young heart out heart away.

Then the blissful days of courtship that followed, when he sought her in every nook and corner to get his old sweet word from those rosy lips that, to him, resembled only rainbows stepped in morning dew.

Then the rupture of his confidence and first kiss of love when their natures seemed merged into one soul—the wedding-morn, when he made her, though an orphan and penniless, a bride, and whispered that she was more precious to him than if she had been the daughter of an hundred earls.

Quick to follow was the closing scenes, after their too brief bliss, in the pretty bungalow down by the sea, where he laughingly declared he would enjoy a whole year's seclusion away from the busy haunts of men while Vernon Park was being rebuilt and thoroughly refurnished and renovated to receive his charming young mistress. And up to now had not it been his desire to show her their home himself in all its complete beauty and welcome her on its threshold?

Then that fatal project seized him to take that trip to Africa to shoot big game, and to bring back trophies to lay at her feet.

She could feel his clinging lips pressed to hers, his loving embrace, as she bade him a last sobbing good-bye! And how fondly he clided her for the tears that would not be denied, and his last words seemed to ring in her ears,—

"Heaven bless and guard my sweet wife!"

Then, when he had rushed away, the dark desolation she felt, a kind of awful presentiment of evil which she could not stifle or bary.

And as she missed the sunshine and azure sky seemed to mock her misery, to gibe at the hot scalding tears that kept rising to her eyes. The undulating meadows, the smiling farms and cottages, half-smothered in their green robes, all spoke of joyous life and restful peace—a peace she felt never would be hers again on earth.

"Paddington at last!" Mr. Reeves exclaimed with relief. "I only hope we shall be fortunate enough to catch the train for Bevanstoke."

She sought her cloak about her with a little shiver, and took his proffered hand passively, and allowed him to lead her to a cab, as if her senses were numbed and she powerless to assert her own will.

"I really must insist upon your taking some refreshment, Lady Vernon," Mr. Reeves remarked, gravely, when they reached Waterloo

and the tickets were procured. "We have eleven minutes to wait. A basin of soup with a glass of wine in it will do great things. I will join you in one myself."

"As you like," she replied, docilely, trying to swallow it to please him. "I have been thinking, and oh! Mr. Reeves, the agony of this journey I shall never forget. I feel flying into space, to some unknown region of fresh torture."

"You are feverish and fatigued. The unhappy events following one upon the other accounts for your feelings, Lady Vernon."

She sighed, but gave him a mute glance, expressive of her thoughts, which was most touching and pathetic in its childish clinging gratefulness, and somehow the cute, head-headed lawyer felt a shudder, very suggestive of moisture, arise in his hair, sharp grey eyes, and a marble-like substance about the region of his throat.

CHAPTER II.

LIKE some horrible nightmare she found herself being led hurriedly up a soft yielding carpeted staircase, lined with Italian stucco, the exquisite forms of most of the banister godesses, holding flowers, ferns and delicate Roman lamps.

She remembered her husband mentioning to her this furniture, a tribute to her, because she admired the works of the great Italian masters in Florence while on their wedding tour.

But she had very little time to note anything particularly, for crimson velvet curtains shrouding a doorway, were silently caught up by Mr. Reeves, and she found herself in a half-darkened room from which the bright light had evidently been carefully excluded.

"Has she come?" asked a feeble voice from a magnificently canopied bed of rich, ruby velvet and turquoise blue silken fringes.

"Yes, my lord, Lady Vernon is here," replied Mr. Reeves in soft modulated tones. The dying man raised himself on his elbow with a gesture of eager impatience.

Mr. Reeves led his companion to the bedside.

"You have of course been told everything, the motive for this strange step?"

"Yes," she faltered.

"And you consent?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Remember, it is only a form; but one that I owe to your unborn child."

A flood of deep crimson leaped to her pale face at this allusion to her coming maternity.

"You know this?" she breathed.

"My brother wrote to me and entreated me to make his child my sacred care in the event of anything happening to him; the blow has descended on our house tenfold, for I, also, am struck down."

"Is there no hope?" she said, tremulously, "it is so hard to be cut off in one's prime."

"Heaven's will be done. I am perfectly resigned," he answered, almost firmly, "the bitterness of death is now conquered."

A gentleman, evidently a doctor, stepped quietly forward from behind a gorgeous screen that stood beside the bed, and Mr. Reeves conducted the sorrow-stricken girl from the room down into the drawing-room.

Could death be hovering over the portals of this fair English home, was the thought that struck her as the scene presented before her of brightness and beauty met her eyes.

Maize plush, and rose-coloured satin sofas, chairs and curtains, a polished pine floor with here and there a tiger or Oriental rug; flowers and the warble of birds in costly gilt cages, and to crown all a portrait of herself painted by an Italian master during the honeymoon.

She gave a sudden gasp of dismay at the shock, for it opened the world afresh to see the loving thought in every detail of her martyred husband.

Mr. Reeves ventured to suggest he should

ting the ball for some refreshment, to change the content of her unhappy thoughts.

With listless apathy she nodded assent, and then he left her pending the marriage ceremony.

"Could I ever have smiled like this?" she soliloquized, unable to resist the temptation of gazing at her own counterfeit, and turning towards one of the splendid Venetian mirrors to compare her poor, pale, tear-stained face; "no, it is impossible!"

She was not far wrong either in her opinion, for few people would have conceived she was the same smiling beautiful Hebe, her glistening snowy bridal robes sweeping a flower-strewn path, her eyes latent with fun and laughter.

She turned from it with a bitter sigh just as the housekeeper entered to ask her what she would take.

"A cup of tea, if you please," she said gently, in response.

The good woman could perceive the lady was overwhelmed with some gnawing grief, so with innate tact she hurried and quietly left the room.

An elegant, appetizing repast soon was laid before her—spring chicken, a tiny crystal bowl of salad, a gold-dish of strawberries, accompanied by rich cream wafers of pale yellow toast—everything to tempt the appetite.

But she scarcely glanced at them, all she touched was the tea; she felt food would choke her.

After what seemed to her an eternity she was aroused by the entrance of Mr. Reeves.

"The clergyman has arrived, and everything is ready, Lady Vernon; will you come?"

She rose and followed him in a half-dreamy fashion, as if she were walking in her sleep.

Standing beside the bed was a minister in canonical robes, the doctor, and the dying man.

A shaded lamp sent weird shadows into the corners and recesses of the room; conflicting with the dying crimson shafts of the setting sun.

The sublime opening of the marriage service commenced, and for a second time, within a year, the widowed Edith found herself a bride, but a bride of death.

When the service and the signatures were concluded, the minister, with a courteous inclination, withdrew.

"Come, sit here," Lord Vernon said, motioning her to a chair near him. "I want to speak to you, confidentially."

"Do not, I beg, distress yourself. I owe you so much that a breath wasted in talking to me would weigh on my soul. I can see how noble, how generous you are in this grand act to the dead, and to his unborn child. Oh! that heaven would alter the decree of the doctor, and give you back strength."

"Heaven forbid," he said, covering his face with both his hands, as if to evade some terrible avenging spirit.

"Why do you say that?" she asked, a world of tender compassion in her voice.

"Because death is the only refuge, the only escape; to live would be an everlasting remorse, a blighted, poisoned existence, too terrible to contemplate."

"I understand," she murmured, brokenly, a pang of shame quivering on her sensitive lips. "You shrink from this strange bondage this noble deed has placed you in; am I right?"

"Yes, for I love the fairest and truest of women, and she is my plighted wife; when she hears of this she will believe me false, and regret the love and faith she has placed in me; it is hard either way."

"Would that I could heal your wounded soul, noble heart," she said, soothingly, holding out her hand on which two golden badges of wifehood now gleamed, one fresh and bright, placed there but a few brief minutes ago by the fragile trembling hand that grasped hers with a fervent pressure.

"Good-bye," he murmured, faintly. "I am tired, and sunk exhausted, alarming her terribly, lest the excitement had been too much for his strength."

Tossing, thoroughly overcome with the excitement she had undergone, she went to the bell and summoned the medical attendant, and then departed with the weight of ten years added to her young life.

She found Mr. Reeves awaiting her in the drawing-room, evidently anxious to get the business over, and return to the busy metropolis and get into harness again.

"Can I be of assistance to you, Lady Vernon, in any way?" he asked, after handing her a copy of her marriage certificate and other necessary documents.

"No, thanks; all I require is a vehicle of some kind to convey me to the station."

Mr. Reeves looked at the lady with dazed amazement, as if he could not credit he had heard aright.

"Do I not make myself understood? I cannot wonder if I do not, for I am quite distraught."

"Surely, my lady, you will never leave your home and husband to-night?"

"I would rather perish on the roadside than stay here," she said, agitatedly.

"Is this wise?" he interposed. "Pardon me for presuming to question your intentions, it is with the purest motive, I assure you, that I tender my advice, which is to stay, under all circumstances, until the end. It is your home, doubly your home."

"I am quite sensible of your earnest desire to serve me, but on no account could you prevail upon me to stay in this house now my mission here is concluded. Each moment I come across some memento of my dear lost husband—household treasures collected together in our travels, and sent here to beautify our home! A mist of tears welled into her eyes, and her sweet face was drawn with anguish as she recalled that sweet, dead past.

"Each time my eyes dwell upon them the wound seems rent afresh!"

"But, eventually, when the cloud is raised, you will, of course, make Bevanstoke your home?"

"No! emphatically no! The associations would be too harrowing!"

Mr. Reeves pursued the subject no further, but quietly took his leave, after making arrangements for the carriage to be in readiness according to her ladyship's instructions.

As he made his way briskly on foot to the station, he murmured to himself,—

"There's a fine property which the late lord has just spent a little fortune in rebuilding and decorating for his bride likely to be shut up and left to the tender mercies of the rats and mice."

CHAPTER III.

It was the evening following the solemn nuptials between Lord Roland Vernon and the widow Edith, Lady Vernon, and still the pulse of life lingered in the weakened frame.

The heavy velvet curtains were drawn back from the window by the orders of the stricken man.

The cloudless beauty of the evening sky, bright with the peaceful radiance of the stars, shone in upon the lonely, weary watcher.

"How long will this burden of life last?" he murmured, with a sigh of hopeless bitterness. "It is hard to die; yet they tell me I am weak! How long will it be before I solve the greatest of all problems—the problem of death!"

The silvery gleam of the evening star, or rather planet, luminous and brilliant, stole through the window, and cast its bright reflection on a mirror.

"Star of promise, are you?" he mused, "come to cheer me in my dark journey through the valley of shadows, to buoy up my sinking courage to victory? Blessed

star, guide my tottering steps, for I need aid!"

His hands stretched forth towards the illumined sky beseechingly, as if invoking that blessed angel peacemaker to descend upon his storm-tossed soul, to breathe into it resignation.

A soft footstep crossing the thick velvet pile carpet arrested his attention, and his wan, haggard eyes turned to meet his patient medical friend who had never left him for more than an hour at a time ever since his dangerous illness.

Doctor Ambrose turned up the reading-lamp on the table by the side of the bed, looked at his patient intently, and held his hand for several minutes to study the beats of its pulse.

An expression of intense, anxious relief stole into his earnest countenance after releasing the fragile hand.

"Heaven be praised!" he ejaculated fervently. "It is almost miraculous!"

"What are you saying?" queried his lordship, sadly.

"That there is a turn for the better, my lord! That divine providence has combined with our poor skill, and the danger is past."

"What!" he gasped, raising himself with a sudden feverish strength on his elbow. "Is it possible that I shall live?"

"Yes; more than possible, for the dew of life is bathing your forehead, and your hands are damp with it, replacing the consuming fire that was carrying you away from all you prize and hold dear!"

"Better had you told me I had but one more hour to live than this," he murmured, brokenly clasping his fingers together in mute agony piteous to witness.

"His brain is evidently weakened," was the doctor's inward comment. "I must rally him with a little stimulant from this nervous prostration."

He poured out a glass of wine and held it to his lips.

"Would that I could thank you for the noble part you have taken in this fatal recovery! but I cannot. You have recalled me back to a life of torture, of remorse bitterer than a thousand deaths."

"Morbid fancies created by sheer weakness," he interposed, gently.

"The fancies of a man whose aim and hope of life has perished," he retorted, earnestly. "Oh! it is too hard, too heavy for thy servant to bear with patience."

"Be calm," his friend implored, laying his cool hand on his poor restless ones, soothingly; "this wonderful reprieve must be for some wise purpose; it has been decreed by the greatest of all Physicians."

With a long-drawn despairing sigh Lord Vernon turned his face to the wall and fell into a calm, restful sleep; tired nature came to his rescue in spite of himself to raise him from his torpor.

Doctor Ambrose was a true oracle concerning the recovery of Lord Vernon, for a few days more found him seated in an easy chair propped up with pillows.

In a fortnight he was pronounced fit to travel.

"Travel!" he groaned. "Henceforth I shall be a miserable wanderer, finding no abiding place to rest my hungry spirit and weary feet."

A settled gloom seemed to have descended upon his fair head, that only time and change could lift, so the doctor said.

But he shook his head incredulously as he prepared to take his leave of the fairest domain on the face of the earth, eager to shake the dust of it from his feet.

It was a glorious summer morning when he bade the home of his fathers good-bye; there had been an early morning shower, and sparkling drops, like crystal tears, shined tremulously on the shrubs and leaves of the bursting roses, and the soft, emerald turf looked like a rich carpet.

Yet all the beauty of the scene failed to

extract one sigh of regret from the man who was leaving its seductions with the fixed intention of never looking upon it again.

In less than an hour he was whirled into the teething busy hive called London, where men and women pushed and jostled each other unceremoniously, perfectly reckless as to opinions or consequences.

He hailed a hansom in the station-yard, and drove to Kensington, the *élite* of suburbs, where everyone with a good account at their banker's flock, because it is hall-marked by the upper ten.

He looked very handsome and distinguished, though thin and pale.

There was a well set, high bred air in the sharp, decisive tread and lofty way he held his head.

His mouth, which was as finely curved as a woman's, was sweet and yielding, denoting a want of will and resolution; but at the moment that his slate-gloved hand held the huge brass knocker of a palatial residence in Queen's Gate it fell into pained lines born of some settled purpose.

The man-servant who opened the door started back with respectful surprise at the change illness had evidently wrought upon him.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he stammered, "I was took by surprise, you look so different."

"No wonder, Clark, seeing that I have risen from the dead," he replied; "but tell me, is Miss Vange at home?"

"Yes, Mr. Vernon," he returned, swiftly, leading him upstairs into a *bijou* little room, a marvel of pale turquoise blue and dainty lace and pretty white wicker furniture.

He threw himself down on a soft inviting couch covered with an opossum skin, and covered his face with his hands.

In his abstraction he did not hear the door open till two soft white arms were entwined round his neck, and a cloud of nut-brown hair fell in waves about him, its perfume stealing like sweet vapours upon his very senses.

"Adah," he said, trying to unloose those clinging arms, "I am not worthy of your dear love; it is to tell you with my own lips that I am here."

With a look of incredulous wonder she freed him, and knelt on a cushion to gaze into the pallid, sad face of the man she had surrendered up her young heart to in all its rich freshness and loyal faith and trust.

"You have been ill, Roland. Oh! why did you not write or send to me; but (and here she faltered as if afraid to utter the dismal word that sprang to her lips), you have also sustained a loss," her eyes resting on the deep crape band of his hat that lay beside him.

"Yes, my brother," he replied, sadly; big tears welled into her blue eyes—tears of pure sympathy, "and I am the last of my race in the direct line; but this is not what I came here to tell you. I have come to say good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" the girl repeated, in a dull, dazed way, as if some blight had fallen on her from above. "Do you know, Roland dear, you are breaking my heart?"

"Heart!" he groaned, bitterly. "If you knew how mine is bleeding now you would pity me; oh! my darling, my precious love! if you knew all you would loathe me as you would some leper. I am a base coward; but I was in the jaws of death!"

She listened on to his wild incoherent language—the dewy velvet bloom of her fair face faded into ashy whiteness, her eyes dilated with vague alarm at his strange words.

"I do not understand," she faltered. "I can see you have been very ill, and deeply depressed by your sad bereavement; but, beyond that I cannot go; do in pity's name tell me all!"

"Adah you will hate me; oh, my darling! I am but a poor weak wretch when I should be strong for both our sakes."

"Be brave, dear Roland!" she urged. "I

am ready to hear your confession. If you have erred my love is strong enough to pardon you and to plead to the All Pitying One above to bless and keep you from temptation."

Sublime love shone in her beautiful innocent eyes as she took his listless hands in hers, and poured out those words of pure devotion.

"Listen, then," he said, clenching his teeth together with a firm resolve to reveal all, and so end the cruel suspense she was suffering. He proceeded,—

"While hastening back to see my lawyer on the unhappy tidings of his death I rashly remained on deck during a heavy pelting storm; the result was a chill, and inflammation of the lungs. When I reached London I went to my lawyer, more dead than alive. He immediately had me conveyed to our home, which was then awaiting the arrival of my brother and his young wife. Then came excruciating pain, followed by a weakness akin to death. The doctors gave up all hopes of my life, and in my despair and utter weariness of everything earthly, I (here he paused as if for breath)—I—well the truth is—the property unless I married would revert to a cousin, a man we both dislike."

"Married!" her frozen lips echoed, shrinking from him appalled at those terrible words. "I told you you would recoil from me," he said with grim despair.

"Roland, Roland, what do you mean?" she asked, wringing her hands in piteous helplessness. "married, did I hear aright?"

"Yes, I have married my brother's widow; but oh! have mercy!" as he put forth his hands entreatingly towards her, "have pity, it was done at the moment when I believed the next would be my last."

She tottered to a chair, her sweet face rigid, her heart throbbing madly, her pretty, bright eyes clouded with passionate pain, the ruthless blow was struck at last that shattered all her young hopes.

Not a sound, except the regular tick of the timepiece on the mantel shelf, could be heard in the room, till at last he could endure the silence no longer, and he rose and stood before the crouching form of the girl he loved with a love stronger than death, and contemplated the havoc made in one brief half hour of her blithe happiness, all her girlish beauty seemed faded, as with hands tightly clasped to her heart, and full, tearless eyes fixed on vacancy, she sat on mute with a dumb despair.

He fell on his knees by her side and caught those icy hands in his, and chafed them with his own fevered ones in a delirium of anguish.

"Adah!" he implored, "my heart's own love, look at me, speak to me, this frozen silence stabs me to the heart; Heaven knows I have never strayed from you in one thought, my love is eternal. The woman I gave the name of wife to I have never even seen! She stood by my bed, and I heard her voice, a low sweet one, that is all I can recall. I swear by all that I hold most sacred, that my fealty to you is true till death."

"Yet you placed this barrier between us," she moaned; "could you not have been true in death, as well as life? Do you forget the compact we made last Christmas when the bells were ringing in the new year, to be constant and true to each other until life's end? Look at the ring you gave me then, and it's sacred motto 'Misphah,' and now all is a mockery."

"Reproach me, revile me," he interposed with humble resignation; "fitless as the torment I have suffered alone, unseen by any eye but Heaven's. When I am wandering in far off lands, carrying the burden of my cross, as Christian did, some scrap of comfort may visit my lonely hours, in submission to your just condemnation of one who was tempted to commit a rash action to serve a dead brother, and was bitterly punished, though justly, by the idol of his heart."

"I am vanquished, Roland," she cried, stretching forth her hands deprecatingly; "you are not to blame; it was our cruel,

remorseless destiny, and we must accept it as inevitable; but what has become of this—this lady?" her lips refused to frame the odious term wife.

"I cannot say! She left the Hall as soon as the fatal knot was tied, so they tell me."

"And you have no idea of her whereabouts?"

"None whatever, unless she has returned to Devon."

"What if she should claim her rights? I mean her position as your wife?" she suggested, a spice of jealousy in her voice.

"My very soul revolts at the mere thought," he said, with a shudder; "no mortal power on earth could force me to feel otherwise. She is my brother's widow, sacred to me as if a bride of the church."

An expression of intense relief escaped her at his emphatic, solemn assurance.

"Are you not sorry now that I was spared to relate this story of a doctor's error?" he added miserably.

"No, a thousand times, no!" she responded, eagerly, her true, loyal nature asserting itself. "While you live our hearts are one in thought! It matters not how far away we may be from each other, the union of our souls can never be severed."

"But your sweet life will be wasted! I dare not accept such a sacrifice," he pursued. "I do not say forget me, but seek happiness with someone better and worthier than I. It would be the act of a villain to bind you to such an unholy compact."

"I shall never marry while you live!" she replied, firmly.

"May your release not be far distant," he murmured. "Maybe it will not, for I intend going out to Africa to find my brother's remains, and bring them over here for Christian burial. That is my first plan, you see, my lost love! I feel it imperative on me now to have some purpose, and that an active one, to keep me from my own dark thoughts."

She was sobbing quietly at the dreary exile before her noble, martyred lover in those burning lands of poisonous vapours; not of herself, lonely and wretched, as she was sure to be without the sweet hopes which had made each day a joy, because it lessened the time when she fondly believed they would meet at the altar never more to part.

He gathered her weeping to his breast, and kissed the hot, blistering tears as they fell, murmuring all the tenderest words into her ears till she felt faint and giddy.

"Heaven help me!" she faltered; "and bless and protect you; I must go!" he said.

"What?" she gasped, clinging to him in a wild, convulsive burst of frantic despair as she realised that the exquisite, torturing moment had at last come when they must perhaps look their last upon each other.

"Good-bye! my much-wronged love! good-bye!" he breathed, feeling he dare not trust himself to remain another minute, lest he should lose all command over himself.

He held her for one more instant, yielding, passive in his arms, and gave one last yearning, absorbed look into her face, as if he was committing each feature to the tablets of his heart, never to be erased, then released her gently, and laid her on a couch, her face rigid, her eyes closed in merciful oblivion.

The tension on her nerves had been too heavy, and the brave young nature succumbed at last.

He summoned her maid, and placed five sovereigns in her hand, and entreated her to watch over her, then fled from the house, never daring to look back, lest his courage should fail him, and compel him to return.

CHAPTER IV.

In a very short time Lord Vernon was seated in a comfortable apartment in his hotel leading off Piccadilly, which he always frequented when paying a visit to the metropolis. He was busy writing letters with nervous

energy, as if he must kill thought by hard work of some kind.

The sleek, suave waiter knocked at the door while he was scratching away with lightning speed with his pen.

He glanced up with a bored expression at the interruption.

"If you please, my lord, a gentleman wishes to see you," presenting a silver tray with a card on it.

"What can he want?" he thought, with a gesture of irritation. "Show Mr. Mansell in," turning to the man sharply.

Soon after the waiter's retreat a young man about the same age as Lord Vernon stood in the doorway, hat in hand.

Any one could have seen at a glance they were allied by blood. There was the same lithe, sinuous figure, graceful and gentlemanly, and, excepting a different expression of features, a great resemblance.

"Dear boy, I am so glad to see you in the flesh!" he said, holding out his hand cordially; "upon my soul I am!"

Lord Vernon looked up at his visitor with sheer amazement as he shook hands with him.

"You look as if you don't quite believe me," he continued. "How is it, cousin, that you generally misjudge me?"

A pang of self-reproach seized him at the home thrust.

"Who knows, perhaps after all it is only prejudice, and an unjust one, too?" flitted across his mind, softened by the suffering he had undergone of body as well as mind.

"I trust I have not wrongfully. I am no saint, Ramsay, to condemn my fellows, goodness knows."

"But you confess now that you have, at times, ascribed a few sins to my credit which have been, after all, imaginary, eh?" this good humouredly.

"Well—er, you see, Ramsay, I am only human, and likely to err in more ways than one; but what brings you here, and how did you know I was in town?"

"I met Paxton at the Guard's Club, where I was luncheon with a friend, and he told me you had arrived and taken up your quarters here."

"It is a miracle though I am here, Ramsay; never has man been nearer the gates of the other world than I!"

"That is one of my reasons for calling, dear boy," this insinuatingly, "to congratulate you from my very heart on your recovery."

This avowal touched Lord Vernon to the core.

"How cruelly I have misjudged him," he thought, thoroughly abashed. "I believed him counting the hours that would place me in eternity, and he in my place."

In a perfect contrite revulsion of feeling he replied,—

"Ramsay, I thank and believe you."

"Then we are more than cousins, dear boy, we are friends; well, this is as it should be, considering we are the last of our race, and poor Algernon is gone. I suppose you will settle down soon at the Hall."

"No, I am off to Africa to seek for poor Algy's remains."

He gave a soft whistle of surprise, and caressed his fair moustache, his brown, cruel, cold eyes snakily resting upon his cousin.

"Rather a hazardous project, isn't it, to carry out alone? Surely you haven't just escaped from kingdom come to wish to get sent there with scant ceremony; savages have a knack of dispatching their victims, too, in anything but a nice and comfortable way."

"I shall have to take my chance, my mind is fully made up; no advice could change my purpose," he returned with dogged persistence.

"Well, since you are resolved, I proffer my company and poor services in the cause. I could not think of permitting you to risk a dangerous enterprise alone."

"You mean it?" exclaimed Lord Vernon

his face flushing with pleased astonishment. "Then I accept your offer with the same frankness as it is tendered. Ramsay, you are a good fellow; mind, you go as my guest."

This was a delicate hint to let him know that he would pay all expenses, and so relieve him of any kind of embarrassment.

"And if you have nothing better to do come to dinner to-morrow, and then we will arrange our future plans and route."

Ramsay Mansell accepted the invitation with an assumption of eager friendliness, and shook hands heartily with his kinsman.

"My Lord Vernon, you think yourself very cute," he soliloquised, as he strolled into Piccadilly, "but you are only a puppet in my hands. So you thought that sly matrimonial affair was safe in the keeping of Reeves; but lawyers shouldn't keep clients waiting in a room alone where important documents are; it is a denuded bad habit."

And he chuckled a long demoniacal laugh, and crossed over to the Green Park, spick span and perfect in dress from his white cloth gaiters to his glossy silk hat.

He walked on till he reached the Criterion; here he stopped, and then entered with a bland, though artificial smile on his finely cut features.

Two or three smiling Hebes pushed forward to serve him, between the magnificently decorated stage, for so these bars seem to the simple country folk when their eyes first catch sight of the glitter of coloured glass and ferns and exotics.

He was evidently an *habitué* of the place.

"Sherry and orange bitters?" one of them asked demurely, a tall, queenly girl, with a creamy complexion, but otherwise devoid of colour.

"If you please," he answered, gallantly, "and take pity and relieve me of this," detaching a dainty tea rose bud from his button hole.

"For me?" she said, proudly. "You are too thoughtful."

"That would be impossible where you are concerned," he whispered; and she simpered and blushed with pleasure at his great condescension and evident admiration for her pretty self.

Could she have known that the slender white hand which held the wine glass to his lips was as fierce and cruel as a tiger's claw she would have flown from him with terror.

The next evening he presented himself at Lord Vernon's with military punctuality, garbed this time, with delicate consideration, in mourning.

His host brightened up a bit when he entered, and gave him a friendly welcome, touched still more by this clever little idea of the sombre garments.

"You will find the viands excellent, Ramsay, but my society flat, so you must let one counterbalance the other," he observed, as they commenced with a dish of native oysters. "If you take my advice you will try the oyster omelettes, they are really fine."

"This kind of thing will spoil us for our African repasts," he laughed. "I expect we shall have to put up with the ordinary skill of some dasky maiden who uses one pot for everything, and whose dirty fingers will be the only seasoning."

"In that case, we had better go as well provided as possible with tinned stuff," interposed Lord Vernon. "Anything would be preferable to that unsavoury style of dining."

"By the bye, you haven't told me what you intend doing with Bevanstoke?"

"Do!" his lordship repeated. "Close it, of course. The servants were all newly engaged by Reeves for my unfortunate brother, so I have no qualms in discharging them. They were all Londoners, as it happened. I have been recommended to a very trustworthy couple who go down to-morrow to take up their quarters."

He did not tell him how he had hoped Lady Vernon would have taken up her residence

there; but, as if Mansell divined his thoughts, he remarked,—

"I wonder you have not suggested that poor Algy's widow should live there till you take a mistress there yourself."

He winced at this home thrust, yet he felt it impossible to reveal the truth to him, and merely said, somewhat evasively,—

"The future is a mystery I do not care to speculate upon. I may never live to know one."

"That shot didn't tell," thought Mansell. "He evidently intends to keep me in the dark about this piece of treachery; but it is diamond cut diamond, and so he will find, to his cost."

Many important plans were made to expedite their journey over the wine.

"Suppose you come and have a cutlet with me to-morrow," suggested Mansell, "and then we can conclude all our arrangements quietly. To-night, I have an appointment at my club, so must beg you to excuse me."

Of course he assented. Weary in mind and body, glad to be alone to commune with his sad thoughts. Society of any kind jarred upon him, and he almost wished he had not consented to take his cousin as a travelling companion.

When, on the next evening, he wended his way towards the Temple, where his cousin resided, being one of those individuals who, though a barrister, had never been selected to plead or defend a case, consequently, the black gown and grey horsehair atrocity styled a wig, lay in all their virgin freshness waiting for moths of a different kind to what they were intended in the first instance.

Lord Vernon took a seat in the well-kept embankment garden and watched the crowded steamers sailing majestically along the great silent highway, the swish of the water lapping against their sides seemed to soothe him.

The sun was going down in orange and purple ripples and reflected in dazzling splendour on the dark grey river.

A troop of little ragged urchins ran past him happy as princes, munching slabs of bread and treacle.

"I have wealth and a title," he thought, bitterly, "yet I am the unhappiest wretch in existence. These street arabs scarcely know how to find sufficient food and clothing to keep warmth and life in their bodies, yet they are to be envied. Carking care never assails them. They are proof against envy, hatred and malice. Their happiness commences and finishes with a good hearty meal."

He called one of the boys to him and gave him a shilling. The ragged robin, for he appeared a veritable one in his fantastic garb of tatters, looked with puzzled delight up into his face, then down at the shining piece of silver, as if he could not credit his eyes. At last he burst forth,—

"Is it to carry anything for it, gov'nor, oos is'e fine and strong, I am."

"No, my boy, I want you to go and spend it among your companions."

"Crikey, won't I," he said, with a grin; "good luck to yer, gov'nor," and away he shuffled to join the others flourishing his shilling exultingly before their eyes.

"What would I not give to know the reckless joy he feels?" he asked himself, as he rose and walked through the small gateway into the cloistered silence of the venerable Temple itself.

The choir were practising an anthem in the grand old church. He stopped at the doorway to listen. Their fresh young tones rose on the evening quietude like silver clarions with that pure intonation devoid of all earthly passion which can only be heard in boys' voices. The organ thundered forth as the anthem died away.

It seemed impossible that a few bricks only separated this sublime place, where the tiny trickle of the old fountain mingled with the whispering leaves of the ancient trees from the throbbing crowded Strand. He looked at his watch and hurried up a flight of steps

and was in his cousin's quaint oak wainscotted rooms.

"I am rather late. I hope I have not kept you," he said; "but the fact is I have been studying nature—nature here to the heart of a great city, and I don't wonder this grand old spot has been the hot bed for some of our finest scholars."

"It nurses up a few dunces as well. Myself to wit," put in Mansell, jocularly; "but here comes the dinner," rubbing his hands together, as if he wished to impress his guest with his perfect good humour. "Try this claret, dear boy. I fancy you will like it," pushing the silver jug towards Lord Vernon, after pouring himself out a glass. It was tried and declared first-rate. When the cloth was removed coffee was served. "How stimulating a cup of coffee is?" he observed, slyly. "I know you like it in the French style, help yourself to brandy. I prefer milk you see, placing by his lordship's side a cut glass decanter about half full of spirit."

He watched the liquid drop into the cup with breathless interest, and his eyes blazed with a basilisk light terrible to look upon. But Lord Vernon was smoking a cigar in perfect oblivion of any danger or treachery, and sipped his coffee to the last drop.

"May I offer you another?" he asked, quietly, a sardonic inflection though in the tone.

"I will, I think, but without the brandy, I feel rather thirsty."

"Probably the sauce was a little too highly seasoned. The chefs at these second-rate hotels are too lavish with their pepper and salt I fear."

"Not at all, everything was very good I am sure," anxious to appear pleased at the dinner, though he had only partaken of a sparrow's mouthful of the good things placed before him.

"I feel uncommonly drowsy. It is the first time I have felt so since my illness," he added, after a pause.

"Come to the window, perhaps the air will take it off."

"Thanks, yes; I think I will," rising, and seating himself in a big easy chair.

"I'm poor company for you; pray excuse me, Ramsay, but you see I am only just off the sick list," and his head fell on the back of his chair as if it were too heavy for his shoulders, and his hands dropped by his side, nerveless, as if all vitality had left them.

"I feel quite prostrated," he murmured feebly. "I—I—cannot disguise it—"

But, alas, the remainder of the sentence was never uttered, for the drug had done its full work only too well.

"Went off like a baby, splendid," muttered Mansell. "What a boon that Indian venom conferred upon me when she told me how to use it. My astute cousin, you have indeed put an enemy in your mouth to steal away your brains," going to the decanter that held the brandy, and flinging the remainder out of the window among the clinging old ivy that hung in wild patches and clumps around the sills.

"By to-morrow morning you will be ready for act number two," he went on to himself, as he stood regarding his victim with hard cruel eyes, glittering with triumph at his diabolical success.

In his absorption he did not see a tall handsome young woman who had been watching him intently in the doorway till she came forward with an insolent smirk on her good-looking face.

"Confound it all, where did you spring from?" he said, testily. "I thought Mrs. Holt had let you off for a day's holiday?"

"I changed my mind, because I thought perhaps—" this with an abashed look into his face—"that you might take me out in the evening."

"So I will if you help me with this idiot," he replied, eagerly, the thought flashing into his evil brain to use her as a tool and bind her to his interests.

"He wasn't like this when he came!" she answered shrewdly.

"I can't be responsible for a fellow getting intoxicated. I am going to let him rest quietly to-night; if he is not better in the morning I shall get his people to remove him."

He then gave her a glass of wine and kissed her ripe, pouting lips and bade her go and dress and meet him outside the Alhambra in an hour's time.

She drew to obey him in a whirl of pleasurable excitement at the prospect of so much happiness; while he paced the room uneasily, annoyed at being caught by Kate Rawson so inopportunistically.

CHAPTER V.

The next morning when Lord Vernon awoke from his death-like trance his mind was numbed, his memory a blank. When he spoke it was a disconnected jargon, perfectly unintelligible and incoherent.

In the afternoon two sedate, gentlemanly men, frock-coated, bald-headed—the proverbial type of the medical fraternity, especially those connected with mental diseases—stealthy and silent footed, were ushered into Mansell's comfortable sitting room.

"How long did you say your friend has been suffering from this malady?" asked the two in a modulated chorus.

"Nearly six weeks. It is very shocking, poor fellow, for he hasn't a friend in the world except myself!" he said in a keen tone of deep feeling that any actor would have given a year's pay to have copied, it was so genuine.

"At all events, you make up for the lack of them, my dear sir," said the possessor of the pair, blandly.

"I try to do my duty," placing his hand on his heart hypocritically.

"And the terms?" questioned one of them.

"You see, our establishment is not an ordinary one. It is conducted on the most liberal principles; and my patients, many of them, related to the highest families."

"Quite so. I should not have applied to you if it had not been what you say. An old college friend, now a doctor, recommended me to you. I am prepared to pay anything in reason."

"Well, I propose, before we conclude the business, to see our patient."

"Certainly, gentlemen. Follow me," he replied.

Lord Vernon was lying on a bed busily employed counting a pile of feathers he had mischievously pulled out of his pillow.

Both doctors unanimously agreed that the unhappy man's mind was gone.

"It seems to be one of the most difficult cases to cure," remarked the spokesman; "for it is undoubtedly melancholy madness he is suffering from."

"Yes; I knew that well. What terms will you expect?"

"Would eight hundred a year be too much? You see, being a special case, he will require great care and attention," this silkily.

"I will give you eight hundred, though it is a pretty stiff figure, and some of it will have to come out of my pocket."

"You will never miss it. So charitable an action will surely bring its own reward," spoke up the other worthy, fastening his brown kid gloves with an unctuous smile of intense satisfaction at their profitable day's work.

"Mr. David Croft is the name, please, as they looked up inquiringly as they were signing the certificate."

"Thanks, Mr. Mansell. Now we will release you of your poor friend," as he placed a cheque in his hand for eight hundred pounds.

"It will always be paid in advance."

They bowed, and together dragged Lord Vernon, who was perfectly passive and docile, and led him into the Strand, where a neat brougham was waiting.

"It is too painful for me to follow him. You understand my feelings under the circumstances," Mansell said, as he shook hands with them both, his face assuming a dejected expression of pity and sorrow combined, quite touching in its pathos.

Lord Vernon walked between his captors perfectly indifferent to surrounding objects of any kind. He seemed to be in a dream, which stupefied him by its intenseness.

The drug which his cousin had given him was a most potent one, and is only known to the natives of India. It paralyses all brain-power.

Many of the daisy women who marry Englishmen, should they be called back to England in the cause of duty, rather than lose them, dress their food or drink with the deadly herb. The hideous secret was revealed by the daughter of his old nurse, who was passionately fond of him.

The diabolical plot was conceived before he paid his visit of congratulation and condolence at Lord Vernon's hotel.

Funds were low, and credit nil. He was in desperate straits. Satan whispered into his ear the way out of it all, and, like an obedient son, he obeyed.

"All accomplished in a twinkling," he said to himself triumphantly. "Those two leeches will not find it necessary to declare their patient quite sane as long as they receive their pound of flesh. Now I must practise, till quite perfect, the art of imitating my worthy cousin's rather peculiar signature. But there, it is a labour of love, the golden key to fortune. What a blessing he had signed so many cheques in advance! Everything has worked in my favour."

Kate Rawson had been listening to all that had taken place, and resolved to make capital out of it when the time was ripe.

For upwards of two hours he sat copying with the energy of a hard-working clerk.

"By Jingo!" he cried at last, dashing his pen down, "the devil himself would not be able to see the difference! It would defy the cleverest expert to detect, test as he might, with all his experience and skill!"

The next day he presented himself at the bank, and drew out a large sum of money preparatory to going abroad.

"The new lord intends to go it a bit," thought the manager. "He has drawn pretty stiffly this week. A bit of a gay spark, I expect."

Before Mansell started he wrote to Reeves as Lord Vernon, explaining to him that he should be away several months, perhaps years.

That gentleman received the missive when he arrived at his office.

"What a pity," he muttered, "to see that fine property going to rack and ruin," as he read its contents; "neither he nor his wife will, perhaps, ever enter the door again. Well, well, it is not my business; but still it seems a great waste, and I heartily wish he had not devolved upon me the duty of informing Lady Vernon. He has discovered it is by no means a pleasing duty."

But the lawyer was a thoroughly conscientious man, and painful as any duty might be he would carry it out to the letter for his clients, even at the sacrifice of his own convenience.

So the following morning he was on his way to Dorset to see Lady Vernon.

It was a dark grey kind of day, with a pallid, lifeless sky overhanging—like a slate-coloured tent—the sunless earth, such an one as chills poor mortals far worse, coming in the midst of summer than the winter, for there is no cheerful fire to compensate you by its cheery warmth or companionship.

To his quick, decisive question as to Lady Vernon being at home, he was told "yes!" and conducted into the tastefully little drawing-room of the bungalow by the sprightly Deborah.

"My lady is not very well," she said, as she

placed a chair for him; "but I know she will see you, sir, if you will wait a few minutes."

"I wonder what he has come about?" Lady Vernon said, trembling with apprehension, when her maid entered her pretty little sanctum leading out of her bedroom. She had chosen it because of the splendid view from the windows of the sea.

"He has come to tell me he too is dead, poor fellow. The feters are at last riven."

She looked very lovely in her—sable robes, her golden hair just crowning the snowy widow's cap, her large pansy-like eyes sad, and sweetly appealing in their pathetic expression.

"How lovely she is!" was the unspoken thought that rushed to her visitor, who was not insensible to beauty, though he was a hard-headed solicitor, when she entered the room; "and how shall I break the astounding truth to her, for I feel sure it will be a blow?"

After exchanging the usual formula as to the day, etc., there fell a dead blank pause.

"Of course you are anxious to learn my errand?" he commenced, with a little, dry cough of sheer nervousness.

"I can guess it," she interposed softly, "poor Roland Vernon is gone!"

"Sometimes, my lady, the medical faculty make mistakes, I won't say blunders, and err in their judgment."

"What do you mean?" she gasped, throwing her white fingers together in an agony of awful suspicion.

"Be calm, I implore you," he pleaded, shocked at the ashen pallor of her face, and deeply deploring his task now that it had to be gone through whatever the consequences. "As I just repeated, my dear lady, the doctors were wrong."

"Then all is lost!" she wailed. "Oh! merciful Heaven! spare me the horror of it!" and she bowed that regal young head in a paroxysm of bitter shame in her hands.

His tongue cleaved to his mouth. He felt powerless to utter one sentence of comfort to her stricken, wounded soul.

At last he found courage, and said,—"Lord Vernon has left England for Africa, and I feel sure will never molest you in any way!"

"Oh! the shame of it!" she moaned, not heeding his words; "wife to my darling's brother. Why was I vile enough to consent to that horrible mockery, one that has steeped two lives in perpetual misery and degradation?"

"You look upon it in a rather severe light. Perhaps some arrangement can be made. What, of course, I cannot say."

"If my child lives it will despise me, its wretched mother," she exclaimed, hysterically, "as a creature unworthy of the sacred term of mother!"

"I have here a letter entrusted to me for you by Lord Vernon. Some of its contents I am acquainted with, as he told me them with his own lips. It offers you half the income as long as you live, and then reverts to your child."

"Which I refuse to accept," she replied, vehemently. "No, I would starve rather than touch one penny."

"It is your right," he urged, "don't you see?"

"Spare me!" she pleaded. "The very thought of it heaps coals of fire on my head. I loathe the very thought. No, I say solemnly, I will not accept one penny of Lord Vernon's money. The pin money my dead husband settled on me at our marriage will suffice me and my child if it lives."

He saw she was obstinate, so he refrained from further persuasion, and left the lonely young widow with a profound feeling of increased esteem, though he was mortified at her refusal to accept his rights.

"Such a high-minded, noble creature deserves a better fate," he told himself, as he settled himself down in a comfortable first-class carriage and helped himself to a cigar to

soothe his excitement, for he could not forget the piteous expression of desolation in her eyes when he bade her good-bye. It haunted him.

He thought of his little sixteen-year old daughter at home. And what if she was cast upon the world in the same way, friendless, bowed down with grief, and, then to crown all, to find herself wedded to a man which she felt by the laws of nature was a sin?

Lady Vernon paced the drawing-room, when Mr. Reeves had gone, in a state of wild overwhelming misery, repeating again and again, distractedly,—

"Oh! the shame of it! oh! the shame of it!" till at last, worn out, she sank down on a couch, cold and shivering, as if she was smitten with ague.

So Deborah found her, when, getting alarmed, she timidly knocked, and getting no answer entered, and found her lying shivering and cold as ice, with eyes wide open, but expressionless.

In a panic of alarm she ran and fetched her fellow-servant from the kitchen, and together they raised her and carried her to her bedroom, poor Deborah sobbing out,—

"It's all that old Reeves' doing. She was all right till his evil shadow crossed the threshold. If he ever steps foot inside here again I'll let him have it straight, that I will."

In less than four-and-twenty hours Lady Vernon became a mother. The crowning joy of a woman's life was hers, for it was a son, too. One last sweet link of a too brief past of wedded bliss.

But, alas! there was no rejoicing in the little household, for the young mother lay in that widowed chamber on the very brink of the shining river, while hushed whispers and silent feet stole about like spectres, lest a sound should disturb the sufferer.

At last the great tension on their minds was lifted by the local doctor, who very confidentially explained to the two faithful creatures that Sir James Henderson, the celebrated physician, had at last declared the gratifying intelligence that his patient would pull through.

"Oh! sir! I could go on my knees to you both!" exclaimed Deborah, wiping the swimming tears from her poor tired eyes with her stiff starched apron which only scratched and beemered her face. "Poor darling lady! To see what she has gone through is enough to wring one's very heart since the poor master died."

"Dry your tears, my girl," the cheery little doctor said, "and go and ask cook to make some of her strongest chicken broth, and set about making one of her best things in jelly; our invalid wants nourishing now."

Jane, the housemaid, had stood quietly whimpering all the time, too shy to venture a remark; but at last she found her tongue, and said,—

"Please, doctor, may I take a turn for the nurse to-night. I am sure to keep awake if you will only trust me, and the poor soul is worn out for sleep."

"There is no reason why you should not," he replied, "in fact we shall be very glad of your services."

And Jane was as grateful and proud of the permission as if the good gentleman had conferred some great honour upon her.

The young widowed mother, though bereft of the precious privilege of a husband's love and sympathy, yet possessed the affection and fealty of two humble, yet faithful hearts, and under their fostering care she soon regained strength and health, and her boy, whose advent had nearly cost his mother her life, was a strong, big limbed young rascal, dimpled and rosy as a young Cupid.

For hours Edith, Lady Vernon, would sit with the miniature of Algy, her husband, clasped in her hands, gazing first at the bundle of lace in his dainty blue silk cravat and out, then back to the pictured face, tracing with

all a mother's proud rapture the baby's face in its father's.

"Darling one," she would soothe, softly, "gift from the angels, sent as the dove was to Noah to bring joy and comfort in his tribulation, to you will I dedicate my life, you shall learn to be a good and a great man, and papa shall live again in his noble son."

These were the visions she delighted to conjure up through the glowing autumn days, when the flowers were faint with their own fragrance and wealth of bloom, and the sea calm as a lake and blue as the sky above.

There, by the soft babbling surf, mother and child would pass away the day under the shade of a huge white umbrella, the fresh breezes, pregnant with life-giving properties, scattering its rose petals of health and beauty on both their cheeks.

Master Algy would crow and kick out his fat wool-shed feet at the passing ship, as they glided by like big winged birds, and stuff his rosy flats into his tiny mouth, as if choking himself, was a part of his insane delight.

Deborah was raised to the proud position of nurse, and tried her level best to spoil her young charge, who's creed was that he was not to be denied any mortal thing he clamoured for, not even her only fringe which she took such pains to make trim and nice every morning under her becoming cap, and sad havoc he would make with it, clutching it and tugging it when he was not too amiable.

"I shall have to scold you, Deborah," her mistress would often say, smiling though all the time at her boy's antics. "You are ruining that rascal, in fact we are all a pack of stupid, and our little tyrant king knows it," and she would laugh, and Algy's nurse would laugh in concert, and that would be the end of the scolding.

And thus two years passed away bringing no tidings of the man who had gone to Africa to bring back his brother's remains, and Lady Vernon began to look back upon that eventful time as some vague, delusive dream, when a letter arrived which brought the terrible black past back only too vividly.

It was from a gentleman, and ran thus:—

"To Lady Edith Wynn Vernon. Madam,—It is my painful duty to apprise you of the demise of Mr. Daniel Reeves, who was, I find, your legal adviser and solicitor. I have taken over the business, and should esteem it an honour to be retained in your esteemed service, assuring you that I shall endeavour to do the utmost to merit and obtain your good will and confidence.—I remain, madam, yours very faithfully, MATTHEW COLLIER."

"I am so sorry, poor fellow, he was very kind and gentle to me," she said, when she had read the melancholy news. "Every one seems to die that I like."

Then her eyes caught sight of her bonny boy playing on the lawn with his pet, a tiny white kitten, with his fair curls glistening like spun silk in the morning sun, and his frank, fearless eyes blue as the summer seas, raised to the open French window to look at her.

"Heaven forgive me that rebellious thought," fell from her lips piously, for there stood here one earthly treasure the picture of ruddy health and merriment, whose feeble cries had reached her even at the portal of the tomb, and quickened her maternal instinct into life.

That day a letter was written and posted to Mr. Reeves' successor, accepting his services in all business affairs, in place of the deceased.

CHAPTER VI.

On a bed of pampas and wild grasses out in West Africa lay a man, hollow-eyed and emaciated. A rude tent had been built to keep off the torrid rain of burning sun. Mighty palms surrounded the tent, as if the spot had been carefully chosen for shade.

Great butterflies, red and gold, purple and pink—the most impossible hues the mind could imagine—spangled the wild graceful

ferns that grew up to the eternal blue sky in tree-like stature, and twined their delicate fronds from palm branch to palm branch, making a fence of exquisite beauty and luxuriance.

"Oh! for release from this accursed swamp!" groaned Lord Algernon Vernon, for it was he in the flesh, stretched out on that pallet of grass; "would that I had listened to my darling Edith!"

"Did you speak?" said a soft voice, in a dialect he had learnt, and a tall reed-like dusky form glided into the tent and stood with folded hands across her breast beside him.

A yellowish, soft garment clasped around her lithe waist by a zone of coloured beads, confined it, and her jetty hair fell in a mass of rippling waves to her naked feet. Around each slender ankle were rings of beads, and gold bands, rough virgin gold bright and unalloyed.

She looked a *houri*—a kind of beautiful dark spirit—sent to while away weak man's senses with those magical eyes that were flashing fire one moment and teeming with a sleepy languor the next—a creature to fly from or else yield thy very soul to for ever.

"No," he murmured, "I was thinking—thinking of my land and my people."

"Thy land and thy people are dead to thee. Now thou art my captive—mine, white spirit of the other world, where the sun hides its face," and she took up an improvised fan of palm leaves, and gently fanned him, chanting a weird dirge-like tone the while.

"Nalda, how long have I been here?" he asked, as her song died away in a soft wail, sad, though very sweet and soothing.

"Ten moons; twice your leg had to be set." "I broke it again trying to leap over that swamp, eh?"

"Yes, and dark black death tried to snatch you from Nalda; but I fought it foot by foot, and now you are all mine own," a perfect gleam of passion kindling in her lustrous eyes that sent a thrill of fear through his weak frame.

For he knew he had kindled a wild, mad passion in this dusky daughter of the sun, more to be feared than even the sanguinary savages who had threatened for his life, and from whom she had saved him from the most horrible of deaths.

"When shall I be able to walk, Nalda?" he asked, with a weary sigh.

"I cannot tell; but we will ask the medicine man; but why sigh, sweet lord, when Nalda is here to sing to you, to watch by your side?"

"Would the chief, your father, like to be chained like some beast, unable to rise lest his limbs would refuse their mission? Oh, Nalda! my heart sinks at this cloud-like existence. I have been so active, the first in the chase, the last to seek repose."

"Wait yet awhile, sweet lord, and thou shalt be the fleetest of chiefs in the chase, and thy handmaid shall behold thee covered with glory—the glory of the redekin!" and as she spoke her countenance melted into softness, and she knelt by his side, and covered his white, thin hand with kisses, her magnificent hair falling about her like a glossy silk garment, and sweeping the long, wild grass.

"What can I say, what can I do?" was the tortured thought that beset him. "I dare not tell the truth, lest I raise a spirit of revenge in that untamed breast. Oh! soul of my beloved Edith, fly to me! Spiritualists affirm that distance is no obstacle when people are one in soul. Surely we are that!" and as his thoughts took flight to the fair, golden-haired love of his life, the woman who had saved him from death knells and claimed him for her own, sealing the bond with those hot, impassioned carresses on his hand.

Days merged into months ere he was able to leave the shelter of the tent, for a lingering, low fever, the result of worry and climate, held him in its grim clutches.

When he stood once more on the mighty

earth, image of the Great Master who had fashioned him, his soul poured forth praises and thanksgivings to the jasper gates beyond those sapphire skies.

"I am a man once more!" he breathed; "and a woman beautiful as the women of old has been the instrument; yet I have not one spark of love to return in payment!"

Nalda's father, a splendid specimen of his race, accorded every consideration to his daughter's chosen lord, for such he was considered.

All the tribe paid their abject allegiance to him, even to the children, and brought the spoils of the forests and laid them at his feet, their ebony, almond-shaped eyes twinkling with pride when he smiled and thanked them in their strange language.

If grand sport and wild scenery could have made him happy he ought to have been the king of gaiety, for every day he oared to join the chief a panorama of varied scenery met his eyes that he, traveller though he had been, had never in his wildest flights of fancy conceived.

When they returned of an evening there was feasting and merriment among the tribe, for many denizens of the lonely forests lay about, while a deliciously appetising odour arose from the dainties cooking.

Immense outlets from a great fat eland would be broiling, perhaps, on wood ashes, while caldrons full of every kind of wild fowl would be simmering away blithely.

The sun had turned him to a russet brown, hands and all, and Nalda looked with pleasure at his bronzed face.

One evening she ventured to put the question which had been hovering on her lips for weeks, but a something restrained her—a shy kind of modesty which many of her pale sisters of the north might not be ashamed to possess.

"Sweet lord," she said, softly, veiling her eyes from him timidly, "why hast thou not asked my father to give me to you according to our laws?"

The question came upon him like a thunder-clap, and sent him in a fever of keen perplexity.

"Why do you not answer?" she urged, impetuously, beating her breast with her hands, a little piqued by his tardy return to her seductive blandishments.

"Nalda, your laws and mine are opposed," he said evasively. "Yours would not bind me, because I am a Christian."

"Make me a Christian, too!" she said, simply; "my people need never know."

"You know not what you ask, Nalda," he sighed; "cannot you guess that an Englishman would tire of this land, where the foot of the white man never treads; that if he wedded you one day his yearning for escape would perhaps be gratified by some happy chance, and he would leave you for ever, a perjured traitor to your lavish affection?"

"I would kill him first," she hissed, recoiling from him as if he were about to strike her. "A dark skin knows how to avenge her honour."

"Better to be in the toils of a tiger than this *houri*," he thought dejectedly; "one I might escape from with a little subtle cunning, but her, never."

Suddenly she observed his despairing expression, and the fierce light faded from her eyes; she was tamed by the fear that in her wild impulsiveness she had offended him.

"My beloved, forgive thy Nalda! She knows not what she says in the tempest of her great love, which is as strong as yonder rocks!" pointing to a pile of jagged granite that rose like a cairn along the line of the horizon in the far distance.

"This is getting insupportable," he thought. "I am only human. I am strong now; but how long shall I be able to hold out with this temptress assailing me at every turn with my allegiance to my sweet wife? If ever I needed your prayers, Edith, it is now."

Then he thought over the futile attempts

he had essayed to escape, and how impossible it was ever to succeed alone and unaided, for he was out of the track of ships; leagues of sandy prairies and desert-like plains had to be crossed before the sea could be reached.

"I am doomed," he mused in reckless misery, "there is no escape."

"Why are you silent? Have I wounded thy heart? Speak to thy handmaid, even if it be to chide!"

"What if I were to confess all, and throw myself on her mercy! Anything would be better than this fencing with truth and honour," passed through his mind.

"Nalda, you ask me why I do not answer you," he commenced boldly, resolved to put his fate to the test, come what might. "It is because I grieve to pain you who have saved my life from those monsters, and then nursed me back to health. Ill should I requite such devotion if I deceived you. Nalda, my heart is not mine to give! It is aching and throbbing with wild longing for my wife, the woman I love. If it were possible to reverse what is I would accept the gift of your love, and return it, ay, tenfold."

The girl sat on in stony silence, as if the power of speech had deserted her; then her lips parted showing her glittering teeth that seemed to clench with pent up rage.

"And for this I saved thee," she said, her bosom heaving with the storm that raged in her heart. "Why did I not let thee share the same fate as the white-faced dog, who put a bullet through his brain to escape the torture he knew awaited him?"

"I ask no mercy, I expect none," he said, brokenly; "but, at least, you cannot say I am a coward, for well I know the penalty of my avowal; but, oh, Nalda! you are a woman and a loving one, with a heart of gold, when swayed by its own gentle impulses! Think of the aching heart of the woman who mourns alone in bitter anguish a lost husband! Have some compassion on her if not on me! Remember this, that there is one bond between you which makes you sisters in soul—your love for me!"

His words seemed to touch the best chord in part of that grand nature which lay deep below the surface only waiting the sublime moment to burst forth like a pearl from the dull, grey shell that conceals it from sight.

"Would you tell her I gave you back to her arms?" she asked, tremulously. "If I met you free, would you ask her to call me sister?"

"I would ask her to love the very sound of your name, to remember it in her prayers," he replied earnestly, tears gathering in his eyes, wrung from him by sincere sorrow at the cruel stab he had been forced by honour to deal this loving woman.

"And will you think of the lonely one whose heart thou hast slain?" she pursued, with a dry sob, piteous in its bitterness.

"Heaven forgive me, I shall never forget you!" he exclaimed.

"Seal your words with a kiss; it will be the first that man ever pressed on my lips, and the last till death releases my spirit from its bondage."

He folded her in his arms and pressed his cold lips to hers, not in passion's fervid heat, but such as a man gives to his well-loved sister on parting, perhaps for ever, when their paths lie in opposite directions.

"To-night three trusty men of my tribe shall guide you to the sea, where you will find means of escaping from dangers that I could not save you from if once my father knew the truth."

"And you will do this?" he said, beside himself with joy.

"Yes, go, and peace go with thee;" and before he could realise the astounding truth that at last he was freed from his thralldom, she had silently gone, like some sad spirit, leaving him hope and a wild tumult of sweet soul-inspiring anticipation that intoxicated him by its suddenness.

CHAPTER VII.

BEVANSTOKE was under the hands of gardeners and painters once more, for the master was expected back from his long sojourn abroad, after having made a fruitless search for the body of his brother, as he averred to his new solicitor, the successor to Mr. Reeves.

A staff of servants were installed at the hall, busily employed stripping the costly furniture from their linen shrouds, and unpacking the plush and brocaded silk curtains from their presses to hang at the doors and windows, while the conservatories were being stocked with a valuable collection of orchids.

All was animated bustle and hurry.

A pretentious, showy-looking young person, a Miss Rawson, was the head of the household and certainly used a firm hand over her troop of domestics.

"Miss Rawson is a regular nigger-driver!" declared the women, "a stuck-up marm who thinks everybody is dirt under her feet!"

The men voted her a fine-looking sharp-tongued vixen, which evoked a volley of derisive sneers from their fair colleagues, who refused to accord her one scrap of praise—women like.

"I wonder who that lovely girl is in that picture," the butler said, admiringly, impelled by the magnetic luring beauty of Lady Edith Vernon's portrait, to stop from his work to look at it. "Do you know?"

"Me," certainly not, neither do I want to know!" she snorted spitefully, jealous that he should presume to stand star-gazing at a picture when she was in the way.

"She's more like an angel than anything I've ever clapped my eyes upon," he pursued, unheeding her sour rebuke.

"Pictures always are like that, or they wouldn't be pictures," she put in; "they never paint them true to nature."

"That accounts for that painted photograph of yours looking so stunning that one would scarcely know it was you," he said, dryly, his small eyes twinkling with mischief.

"You are very complimentary, I must say," she returned, tartly, bouncing off in a huff.

"Tut for tat," he chuckled. "She shouldn't ride the high horse, as if she were mistress over the establishment, and bully and badger my little Bessie because we take a little stroll in the park on an evening."

It was not a very united household that its new master found when he arrived in great state to take up his residence in; though, of course, on the surface everything was glassy and smooth to the eye.

A train of followers accompanied him, regular parasites, who fawned on him in hopes of sapping the moisture from the stem and leaving it withered and dry; but they reckoned without their host, for Ramsey Mansell, alias Lord Roland Vernon, was not the easy, soft dupe they fondly believed. In fact, they were more likely to be the victims than their smooth, oily-tongued host.

The stables were filled with the finest horses money could purchase. Profuse lavishness abounded everywhere. It was evident the master of Bevanstoke meant to do things on a liberal scale.

Miss Rawson received her master in a rich violet silk dress and heavy gold chain, her face wreathed in smiles. She was one of his own importations, hence the reason of her airs and graces.

He shook hands with her in a kind, friendly fashion, and praised her handiwork unstintingly, and his friends chaffed and twitted him at dinner, when the attendants had left, upon his being a lucky dog to be blessed with such a well-favoured housekeeper, all of which sallies he took in excellent good humour.

"I say, Vernon, who the deuce is that divine creature depicted there?" drawled a young viscount, indicating Lady Edith's bridal picture.

"My wife!" he answered, coolly.

"What!" exclaimed the astonished young

fellow, forgetting his affectation in sheer surprise. "I never knew you were married."

"No. Well, you see, dear boy, I am inclined to be rather reticent in my private affairs," he returned, pointedly.

"No offence, really, only upon honour, Vernon, you ought to be the proudest man in Europe to own such a peerless creature for your wife."

"I don't mind admitting, since it will probably be the talk of London soon," he said, with an affable assumption of candour. "That though that lady is my wife, we are really strangers. I married my brother's widow when I was under the belief I was dying. Since that time I have never seen or even communicated with her, except once before I started for the Continent."

"Upon my soul, you must be a queer fellow to forego your claim upon such a queen of beauty, brother's widow or not."

"I have only been waiting till the tears were well dried from her pretty eyes," he replied, calmly. "In a very short time I hope to introduce you to the original."

The other man had been listening to the conversation, thoroughly taken aback, as they afterwards confessed, by this romantic story of their genial host, whom they believed was a confirmed bachelor, who liked his freedom in preference to the shackles of matrimony.

"Everything is ripe, the nest is ready and waiting for the bird," Lord Vernon, as we must style him, muttered that night, as he was ruminating over his last quiet cigar before turning into the tempting down bed that awaited him. "It's a daring scheme, but fancy the prize—a lovely wife and the next heir to the property, my stepson. It would be simple madness to be weak-hearted. In for a penny in for a pound."

When a week had passed the visitors began to disperse, for the season was at its height in London, balls, routs, and parties all in full swing. But Lord Vernon refused all the luring baits thrown out by many of his friends to spend a few days in the giddy whirl of New Babylon. He had resolved to pay a visit to Lady Edith Vernon and claim his rights as a husband.

"I am off to Devonshire, my dear Rawson, and I hope to bring back with me my wife."

"Your wife?" the housekeeper repeated mechanically, as if she were dazed.

"Why not?" he laughed. "Surely you never imagined I was going to settle down here in single blessedness."

"Why did you not inform me of this before?" she said, with bitter emphasis. "I thought I was to be—"

"What?" he demanded, sternly, his eyebrows knitting into a nasty scowl. "Surely you never were presumptuous enough to fancy you would be asked to occupy the position of my wife, eh?"

"Certainly not," she faltered, humbled into submissiveness by his mocking cruel expression. "I meant simply that a housekeeper to a single gent is different to being the same to a married one."

"My wife will never interfere with you, rest assured. You have a good berth and good pay. You cannot say I haven't stuck to my word."

"Or I mine!" she interposed, nervously. "Goodness knows I had a hard time of it when that Mr. Reeves came questioning me like some Old Bailey barrister."

"He was a meddling old fool; but there's one comfort he can never worry you again, for he is feeding the worms now, and the poor lunatic is dead too."

"Are you sure?" she asked, swiftly, her usual brazen manner returning once more.

"Why do you ask?" he said, testily. "What would it matter to you if he were alive. Would it put in your way one shilling? See here, my good soul! all you have to do is to stick to me. You will have no cause to regret it."

"But, begging your pardon, you say your

wife, as if you were already married?" she said, in evident perplexity.

"I have been married more than two years," he replied, enjoying her amazement, "only my wife and I, for private reasons, have lived apart. Her portrait is in the drawing-room."

"What, that young thing in white satin?"

"The same. I haven't such bad taste, eh, Rawson!" an exultant gleam in his false face of gratified vanity. "She is very pretty, you cannot deny."

A malignant frown gathered in her rather heavy forehead as she said, tardily,—

"What's one man's meat is another man's poison, my lord," sailing out of the room with her head tossed in the air, in anything but a good humour; in fact, steeped to the lips in malicious jealousy at the thought of a fair young mistress ruling where she had fondly believed she would reign supreme.

"Poor Rawson!" he said, cynically, "I fancy I have taken the wind out of her sails; but there, it serves her right for her airs and graces. She is too high and mighty for a poor drudge of a lady, which she really was till I took her up."

With a jaunty air of perfect confidence he set forth the following morning on his journey to Devon. Irreproachably dressed, and certainly looking a very patrician, elegant, suave, bland and gracious—who seemed born to command by that quiet dignity he knew so well how to assume.

Lady Vernon was standing at her pretty trelliced porch, watching the gambols of her boy, when the stately, graceful figure of Lord Vernon entered the gate.

"Who can it be?" she thought, for a strange gentleman was a marvel in this sylvan bower of ferns and flowers; and little Algy ceased from his play to stare with his large wondrous eyes at the smiling intruder, who saw a vision of fair womanly loveliness, with an aureole of shimmering gold, framing her bewitching face and clustering all around her roses, honeysuckle, and jasmine in a tangled mass of fragrant splendour.

A shuddering quiver of vague fear ran through her breast, like a sharp knife of icy steel, as the dark tanned face of the strange gentleman became visible.

The wild, terrible thought leaped to her excited brain, that at last the man she dreaded, and had in her simple solitude endeavoured to forget, stifle like some horrid nightmare from her mind, had turned up at last, not to be buried in the cells of a dead past, as she had so madly thought in her delusive security.

"Lady Vernon, my eyes do not deceive me," her visitor commenced, raising his hat and standing before her positively abashed by her sweet, calm, stately beauty. "Of course, you recognise me, notwithstanding the change that sickness made in the dear old time when you entrusted your future to my care."

"Lord Vernon!" she said, trying to keep the secret torture she was bearing from his observation.

"I knew you would recognise me," he interposed, triumphantly. "If you only knew how your dear image has followed me from place to place till life became a wretched penance, you would at least greet me with a welcome."

"In Heaven's holy name forbear!" she said, brokenly. "It is sacrilege to address your dead brother's widow in such terms."

"Pardon me, I acknowledge no such tie now; the time for tears has expired, now smiles should take their place, for the poor wanderer has returned to chase them away by his faithful, never dying love."

"Love!" she repeated. "Do not profane the sacred term; you told me your heart was given, past recall, to another."

His face paled somewhat at his false move in this game of life's chess; but he regained his nerve in a moment.

"I was delirious, totally off the balance in mind and strength, and simply asserted a sick person's right to babble over the creations of a blurred brain full of silly fancies and illusions."

"It was no phantasy of a sick man's brain," she returned, gravely, "whatever it may be now. What you said then you meant, for the angel death was floating about your pillow, and truth was in your words that were wrung from a sore heart. Oh! Lord Vernon, you cannot deceive me."

"Will you not extend the privilege of resting beneath your roof?"

"As my husband's much loved brother, yes," she rejoined, pointedly, about to lead the way to the drawing-room.

"No go away, mamie," cried Master Algy, who had sidled up to them, and had been listening to the strange conversation, "come, and see me fly my kite."

"May I help you, little man?" he interposed, coaxingly, thinking willy that his game would be to make friends with her idol.

"Mamie help Algy," he answered, boldly, skipping to his mother's side for shelter, as if he distrusted their visitor.

"But permit me just this once, my dear little man," trying to take him up in his arms, and getting a volley of wrathful kicks for his pains that quite cooled his ardour and unsettled his shirs front and carefully arranged silver grey tie.

"You can't, you can't; only my mamie," screamed the child, red with passion.

"Your son is rather spoilt I see; it is time a father's influence was brought to bear on his wilfulness," he said, gravely.

"My papa's up dere," pointing to the sky, Algy retorted, his limped eyes solemn and softened.

"That is one papa, my boy, but I am your living one; won't you love me?" patting the curly little head affectionately.

"No," he spoke out boldly, "I doesn't like you, and I doesn't play for you at bed time; on'y for my papa up dere in de sky, and my mamie."

Having delivered himself of this clincher to all argument Algy buried his golden pate in his mother's black silk skirt, but, nevertheless, glaring now and then defiantly up into the bronze face of the visitor.

"You must excuse my boy, he is a spoilt darling, Lord Vernon," she remarked, a little shocked at her rebel son, "and is unused to strangers," passing over his significant words of father with cool indifference, as if she had not heard them, though they made her inwardly shiver with a horrible dread she dared not shape into words.

Very gently she bade Algy go and play, ringing the bell for Deborah to attend him, and then led her unwelcome guest into her delicious, flower-scented drawing-room.

How peaceful and restful appeared to the jaded, blasé man of the world this shady retreat by the sea, the soft harmony of colour and exquisite taste displayed in every minute detail revealing the refined nature and soul of the presiding priestess, whose fragile, statuesque beauty appealed to his taste, usually gross and sensual, in a way he had never experienced before in the presence of woman, giving him a glimpse of a divine, subtle influence woven by the mesmeric spell of a pure, unsullied nature, in which sordid feelings held no sway.

"She must acknowledge me, and I will redeem the past, and live a better and godlier life," he thought, hurriedly, as he glanced furtively at her tranquil, pure profile in rapt interest that he could not resist.

The oppressive silence which had fallen upon them Lady Vernon broke, observing,—"You have told me no news of my lost husband; if you succeeded in tracing where he lay in that land of savages."

"It is a subject painful alike to both," he returned, gravely, "yet I can say no much—that I searched long and unceasingly, never giving up hope till I found it was useless and utterly futile," and he raised his snowy hem-stitched kerchief to his eyes hypocritically, as if he was overcome with sorrowful regret.

Those large, liquid eyes sought the floor to hide the tears that would flow, despite her

brave struggle to be firm and cold in her outward manner before him.

But these tears, tribute of an undying love to a dead husband, nettled him so, that he felt a pang of mortal jealousy against his dead cousin.

"Heaven will bless and reward you for your brotherly love!" she said, earnestly, when she felt able to speak without trembling.

That gentle remark, so sublime in its tender, sisterly tone, fretted him. Those clear, starry eyes were calm and serene as they encountered his ardent, concentrated gaze without one spark of nervous self-consciousness.

Had she evinced the slightest tremour or agitation, or the feeblest or swiftest blush stolen into her cheeks, he would have felt more at ease, more certain of his prey.

That his daring enterprise of personating the man who had sacrificed his own happiness to serve a dead brother had succeeded so well was naturally a grand trump card, yet he was far from happy.

"It is my boy's dinner hour, and I always join him, so I must ask you to excuse me," rising and offering him her hand.

"I am staying for a short time at the 'Royal,' and will, with your permission, call to-morrow. My visit to Devonshire, as you doubtless guess, is of vital importance to both yourself and I," this as he bowed himself out of her presence, leaving her in a fever of dreadful anxiety.

"How changed and different he is to the man I believed dying. He spoke of his devotion to some loved one, and now he seems to forget nearly his own words, and looks at me in a way that thrills me with horror," she murmured, as she made her way to the nursery.

Not even her darling boy could chase away the cloud of brooding care that gathered on his mother's usually placid brow, though he used all his funny little arts to make her smile and attract her attention to himself.

A cloud had gathered over the calm, peaceful little home that threatened to devastate it, and hurl her from her beloved paradise, as Hagar was driven forth with her son Ishmael.

(To be concluded in our next.)

FACETIE.

SOCIETY is very queer. The people most sought after are those who do not pay their debts.

"In Stockholm sextons have an eight-foot pole to prod sleeping church members." How the preacher who puts them to sleep is punished is not stated.

A MAN who bought a lot of Havana cigars recently, on being asked what he was carrying, replied that they were tickets to a course of lectures to be given by his wife.

"That artist is a friend of yours, is he not?" "Well, yes, he used to be; but one day he was fool enough to ask me how I liked his pictures, and I was fool enough to tell him."

Some people have such a pleasant way of putting things. "Now, do let me propose you as a member," said Smith to his friend Brown. "But suppose they blackball me?" said Brown. "Pooh! Absurd! Why, my dear fellow, there's not a man in the club that knows you even!"

A DOUBTFUL COMPLIMENT.—As a certain minister was returning homeward, he was accosted by an old woman, who said: "Oh, sir, I do like the day when you preach!" The minister was aware that he was not very popular, and he answered: "My good woman, I am glad to hear it! There are too few like you! And why do you like it when I preach?" "Oh, sir," she replied, "when you preach I always get a good coat!"

"ANNIE, is it proper to say this 'ere or that 'ere?" "Why, Kate, of course not." "Well, I don't know whether it is proper or not, but I feel cold in this 'ere fash that air."

JOHNNY: "What is the matter, ma?" Mrs. Black: "That's what I'd like to know, Johnny. I've tried and tried to get that old Spanish hen to set, but she won't do it, but stands up when I tie her in the nest." Johnny: "Well, ma, p'raps she got a boil."

"How Love is Made in Persia," is the title of a recent article. It is probably made there of the same component parts as here, that is, millionaire's daughter one part, inconspicuous nobleman one part, desire for title forty-nine parts, desire for wealth forty-nine parts. Mix.

WELL MATCHED—in politeness and readiness was a gentleman whose button caught hold of the fringe on a lady's shawl. "I'm attached to you," said the gentleman, laughing, while he was industriously trying to get loose. "The attachment is mutual," was the good-natured reply.

THE Spanish ambassador one day entered the room in which Henry IV. was on all fours, with his little son on his back. The king stopped, and looking at the ambassador, said to him: "Pray, sir, have you any children?" "Yes, sire, several." "Well, then," said the king, "I shall complete my romp."

CLARA (who owns to twenty): "Think of the artfulness of that mix of a Mary Old-maiden! Would you believe it, she told Mr. Sutor that I was twenty-five years old! She knew well enough she wasn't coming within five years of the truth." Dearest Friend: "Why, Clara, you don't mean to say that she should have told him you were thirty?"

WHY HE DIDN'T EAT BUTTER.—"Shall I help you to some better, Mr. Smith?" asked the landlady of a boarding house. "No, thank you." "Don't you eat butter?" "No, not now. I used to, but I've reformed, you know. I'm proud to say I am now a temperance man." "I know; but I don't see why that should interfere with your eating butter." "I don't take anything strong." The landlady simply said "Oh!" but she looked daggers.

HE FINED HIM.—A gentleman was out driving with his wife, who was noted for her bad temper, and, in a narrow road, met a wagon which they had some difficulty in passing. The lady, apparently thinking that the carter was not making as much haste as he ought to do to get out of the way, began to rate him pretty freely. Just, however, as they drew clear, the man stepped up to the carriage, and, respectfully touching his hat to the gentleman, asked whether he might speak a word. The lady, thinking that he was going to apologise for his slowness, interposed, and said, very sharply: "Yes; say whatever you have got to say." Whereupon the man, again touching his hat, and looking hard at the gentleman, said, very quietly: "Sir, I do pity 'ee from the bottom of my heart, for I've got just such another brute at home myself."

"You love me no longer," said a bride of a few months to her better half, in his gown and slippers. "Why do you say that, Bess?" he asked. "You do not care me nor call me pet names; you no longer seek so earnestly for my company," was the tearful answer. "My dear," continued the aggravating wretch, "did you ever notice a man running after a 'bus? How he does run over stones, through mud, regardless of everything, till he reaches the 'bus; then he seizes hold and swings on. Then he quietly seats himself and reads the paper. The 'bus is as important to a man after he gets in as when he was chasing it, but the manifestation is no longer called for. I would have shot anyone who put himself in my way when in pursuit of you, as I would now shoot anyone who would come between us; but as a proof of my love you insist upon my running after the 'buses."

SOCIETY.

Now that May is well on, the members of the Coaching Clubs are getting their teams in order, and the new members especially are preparing for the exhibitions in the Park which will come off next month. The two regions which seem more especially selected as practice grounds are the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park and the broad thoroughfare which runs through Eaton-square, both of which are admirably adapted for trial trips with uncertain steeds.

The ex-Empress Eugénie is quite active just now. Only a very few people were aware of her visit to Birmingham the other day until after she had left the city, so strictly was her *incognito* preserved. Accompanied only by her *dame-de-compagnie*, a maid, and a valet, the Empress arrived in the town early in the forenoon, and after a very quiet lunch at an hotel, set out on a tour of inspection of the principal public buildings.

On reading about the lovely Court gown of the Duchess Hamersley, and the gracious reception and august kiss, Duchess Blair must feel sorrowful that her own lord has no dowager mamma in existence to speak a good word for a son's bride and soften Majesty's prejudices against ladies who marry other ladies' ex-husbands or widowers in too great a hurry. The American peeress is now the Peri within the gates of social Paradise; but the other one is yet without, and may as well beguile the time of waiting by taking stock of Tom Moore's pretty little poem, and considering over the best means of "coming round" the Head of Church and State. The Peri, though rather down-hearted that her collection hardly scraped together of lover's sighs and sinner's tears did not take at once, yet reaped at last the reward that is due to never-say-die perseverance and pluck.

The Queen of Sweden is the active president of a Society of ladies which undertakes, through its numerous members, to collect the unsmoked ends of cigars in the *cafés* and restaurants of the country, and also from the footpaths of the larger towns. Following the example of Germany and France, there will be manufactured into snuff, but instead of the proceeds going into private purses, the poor orphan children of Sweden are to benefit thereby. It is estimated that the amount produced should clothe, feed, and educate at least five hundred children, and it is earnestly to be hoped that the undertakers of so good a scheme have not been too sanguine as to the results.

The Empress of Austria is decidedly better. Mild weather and a strict course of massage have triumphed over the combination of rheumatic and neuralgic affections which threatened to become chronic. Accounts from Wiesbaden show that the general condition of the patient is sensibly, and it is hoped, permanently improved.

The Princess of Wales was consulted, recently, by some good folks in search of novelty for an exhibition to be held for charitable purposes. Her Royal Highness cogitated over the subject at her leisure; and after an interval, has suggested the following very pretty idea, which will probably soon be carried out. "A world of flowers" was the Princess's happy thought. Judiciously intermingled with the pictured blossoms are to be every description of living ones; plants, baskets, vases of out-flowers, wreaths and garlands designed for ornamentation, and, of course, a goodly background of ferns and shaded leaves of all kinds. The notion is so charming as to be worthy of our fair Future Queen; who, with her own happy tact, added the suggestion that it should, if possible, take place on the birthday of the reigning Sovereign. We only hope it will be carried out with a taste and artistic capacity which will do full justice to so very original and pretty an idea!

STATISTICS.

WHAT LONDON PAYS IN RATES. — A parliamentary return lately issued shows that the total rates levied in the metropolis during the year ended 25th March, 1888, amounted to £7,562,310 on a total ratable value of £30,821,500. The average rate was nearly 1s. 11d.

There has long been a belief that the greatest number of deaths occur between four and six o'clock in the morning. Dr. Charles Farr has taken the trouble to tabulate the death hours of all patients dying in two Parisian hospitals during the last ten years. He found that there were rather fewer deaths between seven and eleven o'clock in the evening than at any other time, but there was no special preponderance at any hour.

It seems hardly worth while to discuss which language, French or English, is most likely to become universal when we read the estimates by a German professor of the use of other tongues. According to these figures, Chinese is talked by over 400,000,000. The next language most in use is Hindustani, spoken by over 100,000,000. Then follow English, spoken by about 100,000,000, Russian by over 70,000,000, German by over 57,000,000, and Spanish by over 47,000,000.

GEMS.

It is the vain endeavour to make ourselves what we are not that has strewn history with so many broken purposes and lives left in the rough.

NEVER part without loving words for your loved ones to think of during your absence. It may be that you will not meet again in this life.

NATURE is an enormous system, but in mass and in particle curiously available to the humble need of the little creature that walks on the earth!

THE greatest obstacle to being heroic is the doubt whether one may not be going to prove one's self a fool; the truest heroism is to resist the doubt, and the profoundest wisdom to know when it ought to be resisted and when to be obeyed.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

STEWED BEEF AND CELERY SAUCE. — Cut three roots of celery into pieces two inches long, put them in a stewpan with a pint of good gravy, two onions sliced, and simmer gently until the celery is tender; let the gravy cook; then add the beef, cut into rather thick pieces; let it just boil up, and serve with fried potatoes.

CUTLETS OF COLD MUTTON. — Cut the remains of cold loin or neck of mutton into cutlets, trim them, and take away a portion of the fat, should there be too much; dip them in beaten egg, sprinkled with bread-crumbs, and fry them a nice brown in hot dripping; arrange them on a dish, and pour round them either a good gravy or hot tomato sauce.

MUTTON PIE. — Cold mutton may be made into very good pies, if well seasoned and mixed with a few herbs; if the leg is used, cut it into very thin slices; if the loin or neck, into thin cutlets. Place some at the bottom of the dish, season well with pepper, salt, mace, parsley, and herbs; then put a layer of potatoes sliced, then more mutton, and so on till the dish is full; add the gravy, cover with a crust, and bake for an hour. Or the remains of underdone joints may be made into a very good family pudding, by cutting the meat into slices, and putting them into a basin lined with a wet crust; it should be well seasoned with pepper, salt, minced onions, covered with the crust, and boiled for about three hours.

MISCELLANEOUS.

WINTER is, on the whole, the triumphant season of the moon, a moon devoid of sentiment, if you choose, but with the refreshment of a purer intellectual light—the cooler orb of middle life.

It looks as though the new epoch on which the world is entering as to the manufacture of paper, will be known as "the age of pulp." East Indian ramie, pineapple fibres, bamboo, bagasse (the refuse matter from sugar canes), peat, braken or common fern, flags, rushes, seaweed, tan and hop stalks, have all been proved capable of yielding pulp. In Scotland hollyhock stems have been made into paper; in Ireland the mallow, red clover, hop vine, and yellow water iris have been turned to the same use. In Demarara good paper has been made from the plaintain. In France a patent has been granted for making paper out of leaves, which have been cut, pressed into cakes, and reduced to pulp by being steeped in lime water. Clearly our paper mills have plenty of material in reserve.

SIMPLE DRESS. — In the matter of dress, the habits of both ladies and gentlemen are more quiet and less pretentious than fifty years ago. Men's business suits are on a pattern brought down to absolute economy in expense and fitness for work. Nor are dress suits characterized by any of the superfluities of the last century. Clergymen have given up not only the wigs and bands and cocked hats of a hundred years ago, but the tall hats, the invariable black and white tie of fifty years ago. The judges no longer wear scarlet, faced with velvet. Wigs, stocks, powders, pomatums, are less and less important. A gentleman of 1800, when he went abroad, must appear in satin embroidered vest, a wig and satin small clothes, with white silk stockings. Culture does not lead in the direction of elaborate adornment of the person.

SOUTH SEA ENTICEMENT. — The Samoans sleep on cocoa mats, with a bundle of bamboo sticks as a pillow. The mats are hung about the beams of the hut during the day. During rainy or windy weather cocoonat curtains are let down around the sides of the hut, which in shape is something like a large field tent, but made of a thatched roof, supported by bamboo sticks; no flooring save the spreading out of mats on occasion may require. The position of etiquette in the house is a squatting one, legs drawn underneath. This is a national one, considering no chairs are used, but it is expected of the white visitor. Fashion is as strong an autocrat in the South seas as in Paris, and when you are in Samoa, you must do as Samoans do. They are cleanly of their bodies, washing often and using soap, if they have it, often a bark similar to our soap-bark.

THE TABLES OF ROYALTY. — In Italy the court dines around a table covered with a magnificent service in gold; it is the only luxury; there are no flowers, and the dishes of the country are invariably served—above all the friter, composed of a foundation of artichokes, liver, brains and cocks' combs. At the German court the finest table is that of the Grand Duchess of Baden; she has an excellent French cuisine and a Parisian chef. The Queen of Sweden has a very tempting table and bill of fare—soups, almost always milk, and beef-steak; one of her favourite dishes is composed of balls of mince-meat cooked with oil and surrounded with a garnishing of poached eggs; then there is almost always at each repast the national plate, salmon preserved in earth. Queen Victoria's favourite wine is pale sherry, which she drinks from a beautifully carved silver cup, inherited from Queen Anne. The royal dinner is very complete. The table is lighted with gold candelabra furnished with candles; orchids placed in epergnes rise up to the ceiling. The Queen eats a special bread, well cooked and of a mastic colour.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

—O—

M. D. (Dublin).—Australia is much the largest.

C. E. E.—1. Only a clear merchant could inform you. 2. It would not be at all improper.

A READER.—Apply to the nearest Custom House official, who will give you every information.

FLORENCE A. C.—Put on the gloves, and wash them in cold soap and water as if you were washing your hands.

J. F. A.—There are offices in London where next-of-kin are searched for. You will find them advertised in the London daily papers.

G. W. S.—England and Scotland had separate Parliaments until 1707, when both kingdoms were united under the general name of the "Kingdom of Great Britain."

D. N. O.—Sulphur and water will remove dandruff. Use it in the proportions of one teaspoonful of sulphur to one pint of water. Wash off with clear water. Keep the sulphur and water in a bottle, and apply about twice a week.

E. V. H.—If the wife and children become chargeable to the parish the parish authorities will follow him and compel him to maintain them, and by an old statute he is liable to be flogged. 2. Paint the bunions with tincture of iodine twice a day.

G. F. S.—Common washing soda will sometimes remove warts, if they be soaked in it, from time to time. Nitric acid is the most effectual remedy. Be careful in applying it, so as not to burn the skin. It can be procured at any chemist, with directions, &c.

FAIRY QUEEN.—1. It is quite natural, and to attempt to stop it might be highly injurious. 2. No. 3. See answer to MENTIS, in which Mr. Banting's system is given. 4. Most injurious. 5. Yes, but some friend might be got to buy them at a better price. 6. Very good.

W. J. C.—A notary is a public officer who attests, or certifies, deeds and other writings, usually under his official seal, and to make them authentic in another country. His duties chiefly relate to instruments used in commercial transactions, such as protests of negotiable paper, ship's papers in cases of loss or damage, &c. He is generally called a notary public, and his acts are recognized and respected in all commercial countries.

G. D. S.—The notion that many entertain respecting employment is quite wrong. Thousands imagine that if they could live in idleness they would be perfectly happy, but such is not the case; every energetic person knows that nothing is so wearisome as an idle life. One of the best lessons to implant is work; strengthen your moral and mental faculties; by that means you will strengthen your muscles; learn to conquer your reverses, and then you will be independent of everything.

C. H. M.—By no means listen to the advice or addresses of the soldier who wishes you to marry him "right off," in despite of your mother and your father, whom you expect home from Australia shortly. Naught but grief could come of such a proceeding, the more especially as you don't seem "quite to know whether you love him or not." At sixteen, however "gushing" in heart, you surely have plenty of time before you; remember that to "marry in haste is to at leisure repent."

E. M. C.—If you had studied history carefully you would know that Despard's conspiracy had for its object the seizing of the person of the king on his meeting Parliament on January 16, 1803, to kill him and overthrow the Government. The conspiracy was headed by Colonel Edward. Marous Despard, an Irishman, who was assisted by several others named Broughton, Francis Graham, Macnamara, Wood, and Wratton, all of whom were hanged at Horsemanor Lane Jail, Southwark, February 21, 1803.

A. B. M. F.—It is asserted by physiologists that "the free use of aqueous drinks is promotive of fattening," and as you drink, as you state, a great deal of water, the corpulence of which you complain may be attributed, in part, to that fact. But obesity is also due to an "excess of hydrocarbon in the system," says an authority upon the subject, "and is of course most directly favoured by oleaginous food, such as fat meat, butter, gaviol, milk, nuts, and Indian corn, which contain a large proportion of oil. A strict regimen of lean meat, lean fish, and acidulous fruits which are low in sugar and starch, if thoroughly carried out, is certain to diminish corpulence."

N. S.—To endeavour to perpetuate the memory of the departed has ever been, among all nations, a last and token of affection, hence the origin of epitaphs; sometimes they are apt and appropriate, but too often they are false, both to the departed and the survivors, whose memories must be buried too if they cannot recall instances in which the departed possessed anything but the virtues ascribed on their tombstones; the first burial recorded in the Scriptures is that of Sarah, Abraham's wife. Excepting the stones which marked the grave of Our Saviour, there are no monumental records referred to in Holy Writ; may not this silence be significant of the fact that there is no need to blazon forth faults or virtues, these being elsewhere recorded? The earliest inscriptions we read of are these, "May he rest in peace," and "May the earth rest lightly on him;" these were in use among the Greeks and Romans. The custom of planting flowers around the grave originated in Germany.

CHEV.—1. Your acceptance of the gentleman's invitation to attend the lecture was a condonation of the neglect of which you complain. You did right not to refer to it. 2. You should have invited him to call as usual.

D. D.—1. Critics differ very widely upon the subject of your several queries; and, after all, it is only a matter of opinion. Yours is just as good as anybody's. 2. The Grecian type of beauty seems to have been most admired.

P. R. D.—Forks were used, it is said, on the continent of Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Two-pronged forks were made in Sheffield in the year 1600. Three-pronged forks are much more recent. Silver forks came into use in England about 1814.

G. R.—Perhaps the French method of administering castor oil to children would suit you. It is to pour the oil into a pan over a moderate fire, break an egg into it, and stir up; when it is done, flavour with a little salt, sugar, or currant jelly. This makes it palatable.

Tom.—The probable reason why the young lady is so shy in her treatment of you is that she cares more for you than for anybody else, and is therefore most fearful of not behaving just right in your presence. This is often the case with inexperienced girls. If you should tell her that you love her it would probably put her at her ease, and cause her to treat you with satisfactory cordiality.

Y. R. C.—1. The locust, as you conjecture, is something like a grasshopper, but it has shorter antennae, its feelers and stouter legs. Its strong hind legs enable it to make great leaps, and its long wings impart to it the ability of flying great distances. 2. In Asia and Africa they have been known to appear in such numbers as to darken the air in their flight, and in Southern Europe they have also committed great ravages. In many Eastern countries they are eaten as food.

MAKING THE BEST OF IT.

BEHIND the barred and jealous door,
Behind the shrouded pane,
To sit and on life's failures o'er,
And count the cost, were vain;
We cannot shut our errors out;
As we have shut the light;
They crowd and compass us about,
And mock us, day and night.

So rather open to the sun
Your doors and windows wide;
Concealment and evasion shun,
Whatever may betide;
The world forgives a blunt mistake
When honestly confessed,
If we but frankly strive to make
Of it the very best.

Take heart! No evil weed I know
So rank and wide hath spread
But we may root it out, and sow
The better seed instead;
He boasts the crowning common sense,
The truest manliness,
Who plucks from harsh experience
The perfect fruit—success!

E. R.

E. L.—The great use and advantage of wit is to render the owner of it agreeable, by making him instrumental to the happiness of others; but he who affects to be always witty sometimes renders himself ridiculous. Wit is in the hands of an artist like sweet music, commanding, soothing, and modulating passion into harmony and peace; but this is not its only use; it is also a sharp sword to be used against ignorance and folly.

V. Y.—Shampooing is a term used for cleansing the head and hair. Salts of tartar (carbonate of potassa) is used by many barbers for this purpose. Dissolve one ounce of the tartar in one quart of water; sprinkle freely on the head, and rub well until a lather is formed. Wash off with clean water. Afterwards use bay rum. Another recipe is this: Salts of tartar, four ounces; pulverized borax, four ounces; water, one gallon. Mix, and bottle for use. A fine shampoo liquor is made as follows: Dissolve half an ounce of carbonate of ammonia and one ounce of borax in one quart of water; adding thereto two ounces of glycerine, three quarts of New England rum, and one quart of bay rum. The hair having been moistened with this liquor is shampooed with the hands until a slight lather is raised, which is washed off with clear water, leaving the head clean and the hair moist and glossy. If the quantities of the recipe be too large they can be reduced according to the wishes of the reader.

A. D. B.—Catarina Gabrielli was an Italian vocalist who was born in Rome in 1758. She died in 1796. She was the daughter of a cook employed by Count Gabrielli, who, being struck with the girl's remarkable voice, had her educated by Garcia and Porpora. About 1747 she gave her first performance at Lucos, assuming the name of her protector. In 1750, it is stated, she excelled to such an extent as "Dido" in Jomelli's opera of that name, that Metastasio engaged her as first prima donna for the Vienna opera. She subsequently appeared at St. Petersburg, and received five thousand rubles a month. On her return to Italy she had tempting offers to appear in London, but declined them all, giving as a reason for her refusal that she apprehended her eccentricities would not be tolerated in London society. She closed her life in retirement in Rome. Francesca Gabrielli, the other renowned vocalist referred to, was called Gabriellina, to distinguish one from the other. The latter was born in 1765, and died in 1795.

E. C. P.—1. You must tell us what you mean by French decorative art before we can answer your question. Dealers in artists' materials can get you any designs and paints in the markets.

PADDY BURE.—1. "The Bells of Shandon" is the title of a poem by Francis Mahony ("Father Prout"). It has reference to a fine peal of bells in one of the Catholic churches in Cork (St. Anne's, Shandon). 2. Your handwriting for a girl of eleven years of age is remarkably good.

E. G.—1. You will find a book on etiquette of great service to you. 2. Castor oil and brandy will help the hair, if anything will. 3. You are too young to think of keeping company with a mere youth. It will be time enough three or four years hence to think of marriage. 4. A very simple form of invitation is the following:—"I shall be pleased to have you call at our house this evening to meet a number of friends."

M. H. N.—1. Cardinal Richelieu, who has been so frequently utilised by novelists and dramatists—do wit, Lord Lytton and James—was one of the greatest of French Prime Ministers. He it was, in conjunction with his sovereign, who initiated the European policy of the balance of power; so great was his power, and firm his will, that his name was for a time the terror of Europe. 2. At present neither your handwriting and orthography is fit for a merchant's office; by perseverance, however, they would soon become so.

C. G. S.—Mars-la-Tour is a village of France, thirteen miles west of Metz, on the road to Verdun and Paris. It is celebrated for a battle fought there and at Vionville on August 16th, 1870, in which Prince Frederick Charles achieved a strategic victory over Basaine, who by this defeat was prevented from leaving Metz. The fighting on both sides was very obstinate and the losses very large, the French losing 879 officers and 16,138 men, and the Germans 640 officers and 15,170 men. The greater part of the battlefield is in the territory ceded to Germany, the new boundary line being in the immediate vicinity of the French village.

D. H. S.—Fruit stains can be immediately removed from the hands by dipping them in warm water, and then rubbing on the stains a small portion of oxalic acid powder and cream of tartar mixed together in equal quantities, and kept in a box. When the stain disappears, wash the hands with fine soap. This mixture being poisonous must be kept out of the reach of children. A few drops of oil of vitrol (sulphuric acid) will also remove most stains from the hands without injuring them. Care must, however, be taken not to drop it upon the clothes. It will remove the colour from woollen, and eat holes in cotton fabrics. The juice of ripe tomatoes will remove the stain of walnuts, &c., from the hands without injury to the skin.

GEORGE.—1. The St. Lawrence River drains a territory of over 400,000 square miles, and its basin, reckoned from its extreme source, was computed, before the discovery of the great African lakes, to contain "more than half of all the fresh water on this planet." It is stated that "early French geographers treating the great lakes as expansions of the St. Lawrence, made the Nipigon River, on the north side of Lake Superior, the head stream of the St. Lawrence. Others have considered as such the St. Louis River, emptying into the south-west extremity of Lake Superior." In either case the total length would be upward of 2,000 miles. Besides Lakes Ontario, Erie, St. Clair, Huron, Michigan and Superior, there are several lakes north and west of Lake Superior, which together would about equal Lake Ontario. These all pour their waters into the ocean through the St. Lawrence. 2. In reference to St. Clair River, the depth of the rapids at the point named is not stated.

OXFORDSHIRE.—There is considerable mystery as to the origin of Oxford University. By some its foundation is attributed to Alfred the Great, while others assert that no university worthy of the name existed until after the Norman Conquest. It was incorporated by Queen Elizabeth in 1571. The University Museum was opened in June, 1860. The Cambridge University is mentioned by our earliest historians; the first account we have of it is that it was burnt by the Danes in 870 and 1010. It is supposed to have been commenced by Segobert, King of the East Angles, about 690 A.D., but it was neglected until the reign of Edward the Elder, in 915, who somewhat restored it. In 1110 it began to revive. Henry I. and Henry III. bestowed many privileges on the town. In Wat Tyler's and Jack Straw's rebellion, in the reign of Richard II., the rebels seized the university records and burnt them in the market-place. The university press was set up in 1534, in the reign of Henry VIII.; the Cambridge Philosophical Society was established in 1819, and chartered in 1852; the railway to London was opened in June, 1845.

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